Men-at-Arms

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Napoleon's Swiss Troops

D Greentree & D Campbell • Illustrated by G & S Embleton

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Series editor Martin Windrow

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INTRODUCTION

Switzerland's strategic importance had been recognized since ancient times, when the 2nd century BC Roman politician Cato described its mountain ranges as an 'impregnable barrier that defends Italy like a rampart.' However, in medieval times they became less of a hindrance to movement between north and south, since by the 13th century a handful of mountain passes had become usable in summer. These passes – the Great St Bernard, Simplon, and St Gothard – allowed passage between Italy, France and Germany via Lucerne, Berne and Zurich. By the 15th century they had become important trade routes, which also allowed hardy mercenaries from the confederation of independent-minded Swiss cantons to travel both north and south to hire out their skills. It was this culture of sturdy independence that dictated the Confederation's relations with foreign powers – originally the Habsburgs, then the Dukes of Burgundy, and, eventually, Napoleon.

Ever since the 15th century France had been importing Swiss professional soldiers to serve as mercenaries. Through their reliability and their accomplishments on the battlefield the Swiss secured a reputation that made them a popular choice for commanders and monarchs over the next 300 years. By the end of the 18th century Swiss soldiers were serving in the armies of several European countries; Spain, Holland, and Piedmont-Sardinia all employed contingents of several thousands, but France had always been their largest employer. By 1791 two Swiss Guard regiments and 11 Swiss line regiments were on the French establishment, and since the 1780s the absolutist French royal regime had already started to rely on its Swiss regiments for internal security. Swiss soldiers, with few ties to the local populace, were more reliable that their French counterparts in facing riotous mobs, and this duty – together with their special privileges and high pay – made them particularly resented.

In 1789, as well as the two Swiss Guard regiments based in the capital, four Swiss line regiments were summoned when French units – including the French Guard regiments – started to disintegrate. However, by the summer of 1792 the Swiss Guard was the only military unit in the capital, and King Louis XVI relied on them for his safety in the

Grenadier of the 1st Swiss Regt, 1812 – compare with Plate C2. The achievements of the Swiss in the Napoleonic Wars were perhaps unsurpassed by those of any other allied contingent except the Poles. Marshal Gouvion St Cyr described them in Russia: 'They were invincible right to the end; they outdid nature, and they spread a radiance of heroism over this desert of snow.' (Lami, courtesy Yves Martin)

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Tuileries Palace. On 10 August a crowd numbering in the tens of thousands approached the palace, insisting that the king be brought before the National Assembly. With no option but to comply, Louis asked the Swiss to lay down their arms. The Swiss instinctively refused, and (witnessed by Napoleon) staunchly resisted the mob that rampaged through the courtyards of the palace. Of 800 Swiss Guards in Paris that day only 200 escaped; the rest were hunted down, and either killed on the spot or dragged off to prison and murdered a few days later. After this massacre the Swiss Diet ordered the withdrawal of all its regiments from France.

The impact of the Revolution

In principle, the new French Republic viewed the service of foreigners in the defence of France as anathema, and all foreign regiments were disbanded – but in practice, the new regime could not afford to dispense with their services. The more realistic of their leaders were acutely aware that trained professional soldiers were required as a backbone for the huge citizen army that the Republic was raising, and Swiss were encouraged to enlist in French regiments. Some 3,000 to 4,000 volunteered; moreover, the absence of wholly Swiss regiments from the French Army was to be short-lived.

In 1798–1800 Switzerland itself became a battlefield, as both France and her enemies sought to exploit the country's geographical position as the hinge between the German and Italian theatres of operations. In 1798 revolutionary sentiments disturbed the Swiss cantons themselves, providing a catalyst for foreign intervention. Since 1648, when the Treaty of Westphalia had guaranteed the independence of the Swiss Confederation, only a select oligarchy had wielded any real political power in the cantons. The working classes frequently revolted in search of greater political and economic freedoms, and after the French Revolution ideas of equal rights found a warm reception in parts of Switzerland. In early 1798, a French army invaded Switzerland ostensibly to protect activists who were intent on replacing the cantonal confederation with a republic, and organized resistance – centred on the regions around Berne – was quickly overcome. On 29 March the Helvetian Republic was inaugurated; ruled from its capital in Lucerne, this entity was a puppet government foisted on the cantons by the French Directory.

Austrian and Russian intervention quickly followed, and both sides sought to recruit Swiss soldiers into their military forces. In November 1798 the Directory ordered the Helvetian Republic to provide men for six *demi-brigades* within the French Army. On 4 September 1798, for internal security, the Helvetian Republic had established a small, permanent, all-arms force called the Helvetian Legion, and on 13 December it introduced cantonal militia battalions.

General Napoleon Bonaparte, who returned from his failed Egyptian adventure that October, carried out in November the *coup d'état* that made him 'First Consul' and virtual dictator of France, and by 1800 Switzerland was firmly in France's orbit. Napoleon initially supported the expansion of the Helvetian Legion into a regular army, separately from the Swiss units in the French Army. However, his efforts to impose a centralized government structure on Switzerland were extremely unpopular. The concept of a federal state made up of autonomous cantons was too firmly rooted in their culture, and an open revolt in

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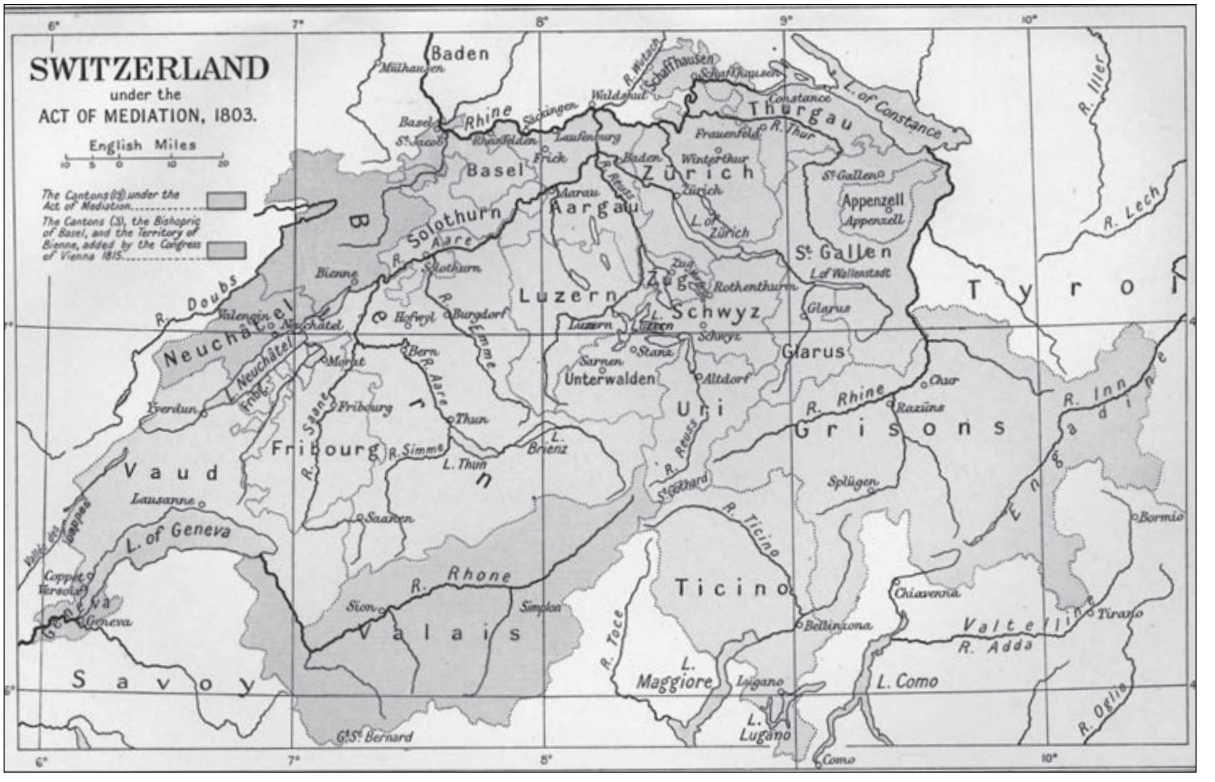

On 19 February 1803, by the Act of Mediation, Switzerland was confirmed as a mosaic of small cantons each with their own laws, currency and police. They sent deputies to a national Diet in Fribourg; the head of state – the Landamann – changed every year, being drawn in rotation from the six largest cantons. Valais was independent from the Helvetian Confederation, and Neuchâtel was initially a Prussian possession; however, both would soon provide troops for Napoleon. (Maproom.org)

1802 persuaded Napoleon that forcing the republican model upon them was more trouble than it was worth. He conceded to a Swiss delegation that 'the more I studied the geography, history and the customs of your country, the more I realized that the Swiss people should not be subjected to a [central] government and to uniform laws.' On 27 September, in exchange for a restored Helvetian Confederation, the majority of Swiss deputies agreed to a 50-year defensive alliance with France. The price demanded for this included a commitment to find 16,000 soldiers for the French Army, and an additional 8,000 troops in the event of any invasion of France. The regular Helvetian Legion would be disbanded.

Between 1805 and 1807 four regiments of Swiss troops, each of four battalions, were raised for the French Army, taking the place of the former demi-brigades. Additionally, the Swiss regions of Valais and Neuchâtel (though neither was then part of the Confederation) each contributed a battalion for French service. Napoleon recognized that professional Swiss soldiers were more suited to some military tasks than French conscripts, and the recruitment of foreign units slightly lessened the burden of that conscription on his own countrymen. From the records held at Vincennes, the historian Tornare has calculated that from 1805 to 1813 a total of 30,526 recruits enlisted in the Swiss regiments and the Valais and Neuchâtel battalions: 7,546 for the 1st Swiss Regiment, 8,501 for the 2nd, 7,189 for the 3rd, 7,290 for the 4th, and a total of 2,323 for the Valais and Neuchâtel battalions.

Then and since, some British accounts have mistakenly dismissed these troops as 'unreliable mercenaries', able to contribute little more than garrison units that released French soldiers for field campaigns.

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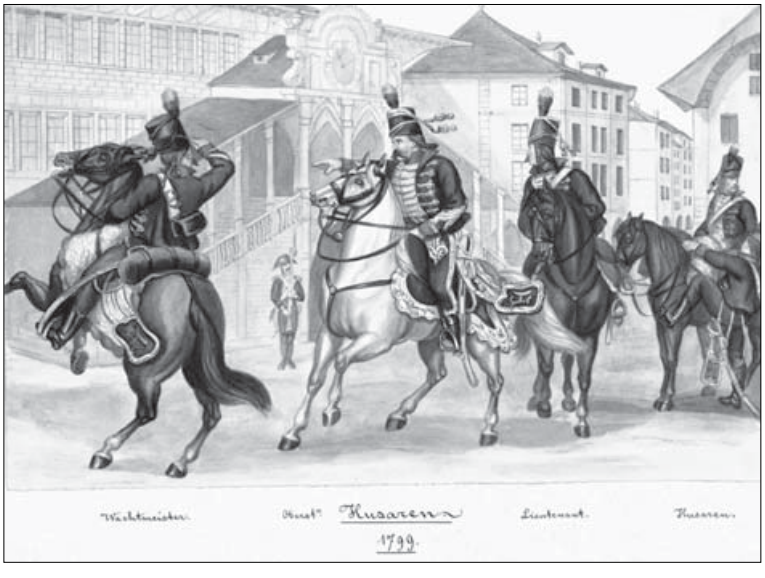
In 1808 the desertion of Swiss troops at the battle of Baylen in Spain fuelled this interpretation; but those troops were not typical. They were Hispano-Swiss units – Swiss regiments recruited to fight for Spain, not France – which had been compelled to switch sides in Madrid only three months before the battle. Personal memoirs of Swiss troops in fact reveal a breadth of military experience, and Swiss contingents would serve in a variety of locations throughout Europe and beyond. Napoleon would use them on the battlefields of Italy and Spain, and in 1812 he reorganized them into a single division for the invasion of Russia. He came to value his Swiss units highly; Swiss soldiers would often be asked to save the day for the French troops alongside whom they fought, and would do so – most famously, in Russia.

THE HELVETIAN LEGIONS & THE DEMI-BRIGADES

After the 1798 French intervention, Gen Soult wrote that 'now we occupied Switzerland, it became the inevitable pivot of operations'. General Masséna commanded 75,000 French soldiers on Swiss soil, both to deter Austrian and Russian intervention and to crush popular uprisings (at times, with great brutality). He started recruiting Swiss soldiers, ostensibly in an effort to engage them in the defence of their country, but made only slow progress. In October 1798 volunteers between 18 and 35 years old started to come forward for the Helvetian Legion. This formation comprised 6 companies of fusiliers (line infantry), 4 companies of chasseurs (light infantry), 2 hussar squadrons, and a company of artillery, but it was only ready to deploy from Berne in April 1799.

(In Italy in January 1799, two further Helvetian Legions, commanded by Cols Belmont and Ernst, were formed from the 2,752 soldiers of the five Swiss regiments belonging to the defeated monarchy of Piedmont-Sardinia, but these had only a brief existence. On 5 April at the battle of Magnano, and in July at Mantua, Suvorov's Russians captured most of them, and these legions were not rebuilt.)

The six Swiss demi-brigades raised for the French Army were each to be composed of three 1,000-man battalions, each organized into 7 companies (6 of fusiliers and 1 of grenadiers), plus a depot battalion of 6 companies. The French agreed to bear the cost of uniforms and equipment, with the Swiss providing the weapons. However, this theoretical strength had to be raised against a background of French oppression, and persuading men to enlist proved difficult. The call



An Escher picture showing hussars of the Helvetian Legion. In 1800 the two squadrons were redesignated as *chasseurs à cheval*, apparently in order to introduce a less flamboyant and thus a less expensive uniform; however, recruits still wore the hussar dolman. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz, 3003 Bern, Switzerland)

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for officers, to be nominated by the Directory of the Helvetian Republic, generated a good response, with 509 quickly commissioned; but the prospects for rankers were less attractive, and many young men literally chose to take to the hills. Service was supposed to be voluntary, with men signing up for two or four years' service; however, by 19 May 1799 only 3,587 men – less than a quarter of the establishment – had been enlisted. Badly equipped and badly paid, the demi-brigades were, according to Tornare, a fragile instrument; the men 'demurred to confront the enemy in their own country… and deserted in great numbers.'

The French war minister Lazare Carnot described the foreign-policy dilemma that Switzerland presented: 'In previous times we could leave the Swiss frontier from Hunnigue to Geneva safely uncovered, for we could rely on the cantons to keep their pledge of neutrality. Now we must commit 40,000 troops to that part of the world, either to occupy Switzerland or to guard the neighbouring depots [i.e. French bases near the border], which have no fortresses to protect them.' Whilst the Rhineland had many fortifications, the province of Franche Comté along the border with Switzerland was poorly protected.

The War of the Second Coalition, 1799–1801

In 1799 Switzerland became the focus of the allied Coalition's efforts to deal Revolutionary France a mortal blow. While Napoleon was away campaigning in Egypt, in June the Archduke Charles of Austria seized Zurich (where the Helvetian Legion and the 5th Swiss Demi-Brigade were engaged), and Masséna withdrew behind the Limmath (or Lemat) river. Coalition strategy called for an Austrian invasion of France through Switzerland, to be supported by two Russian armies sent by Tsar Paul I. The first, under Suvorov, having already overrun Lombardy and Piedmont, would use the mountain passes to move against Masséna's right flank; the second, under Korsakov, would move directly into Switzerland in order to relieve the Austrians there.

When Korsakov reached Zurich in August, he was vulnerable: Archduke Charles had already departed, and Suvorov only started to cross the passes in mid-September. Facing him, Masséna had four divisions under his direct command, one of which included the 2nd Swiss Demi-Brigade. On his left, Gen Chabron's division included the 1st and 4th; meanwhile, another division under Gen Montchoisy, on security duties in the interior, included the 3rd and 5th Swiss Demi-Brigades. There is some debate about which Swiss contingents were present at the second battle of Zurich. Duffy states that only the Helvetian Legion was present (confirmed by Pigeard and Tornare); Dempsey states that the 1st and 2nd Demi-Brigades and a detachment of the 4th were also present, but perhaps only in a supporting role. On the morning of 26 September 1799, Masséna crossed the Limmath and outflanked Korsakov, forcing him to abandon Zurich – together with 5,000 of his men taken prisoner, all the baggage and 26 guns. With the defeated Korsakov in retreat, Suvorov re-routed his own army eastwards, and after this setback Tsar Paul called his troops back to Russia.

The Helvetian Legion had been harshly tested during this battle, and the principle of permanent regular units to serve the Helvetian Republic, recruited from all the cantons, was soon confirmed. One line and one light battalion, three companies of hussars and an artillery company

An unusual picture, by Bader after Gottlieb, of a grenadier from one of the Swiss demi-brigades of the French Army. The figure is notable for the mirliton cap with red cords, flounders and tassels, a red feather plume, and a cockade in Swiss national colours. The coat is blue; the collar is red piped with yellow, the lapels are yellow piped with red, and the epaulettes are red. The cuff flaps are green piped with yellow; the cuffs are red piped with yellow, but should be yellow piped with red – see Table 2. His waistcoat is piped red along the bottom edge and the pockets, and he also has red piping down the buttoned edge of his gaiters. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

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Table 1: Organization, Helvetian Legion
4 May 1798: Helvetian Legion formed 6 companies of fusiliers (100 men each) 4 companies of chasseurs (100 men each) 2 squadrons of hussars (200 men each) 1 company of artillery (100 men)
May 1799: Valais & Leman legions folded into the Helvetian Legion
6 Sept 1799: Legion reorganization 1 line battalion (9 companies) 1 light battalion (9 companies) 3 companies of hussars (222 men) 1 company of artillery (100 men)
1800: Second reorganization 2 line battalions (1st commanded by de Bons, 2nd by Muller) 1 light battalion (commanded by Clavel) 2 companies of mounted chasseurs (140 men) 1 company of artillery (100 men)
April 1803: Helvetian Legion merged with the Demi-Brigades 2 line battalions become the 3rd Battalion of 3rd Demi-Brigade Light battalion joins 2nd Demi-Brigade Cavalry renamed 'Helvetian mounted chasseurs'[1] Artillery forms 'Artillery Suisse' in Cherbourg in April 1804[2]
Notes 1. Incorporated into 19th Chasseurs on 21 April 1804 2. Transforms into artillery company of 1st Swiss Regiment in 1806

were established that month around the debris of the Legion, and in 1800 a second line battalion was added.

In the French Army, meanwhile, the far-understrength Swiss demi-brigades were amalgamated into three formations in January 1800: the former 1st and 2nd became the new 1st Swiss Demi-Brigade, the 3rd and 4th formed the new 2nd, and the 5th and 6th the new 3rd – but even then, each of these could muster only 700 men. All three were initially posted to Gen Sainte-Suzanne's division in Germany, where they saw little action, since the Italian theatre dominated the campaigning season of 1800–01. (However, the 2nd Demi-Brigade may have crossed the St Bernard Pass in 1800 as part of Napoleon's advance guard under Gen Lannes.) On 9 February 1801 the Peace of Lunéville brought an end to the Second Coalition's war against France, though Britain fought on until the Peace of Amiens was signed on 27 March 1802. The demi-brigades were posted as garrisons: the 1st to Besançon, in eastern France close to Switzerland; the 2nd to Forli in northern Italy; and the 3rd to Strasbourg, before moving in late 1802 to the island of Corsica – which, despite being Napoleon's birthplace, was described as full of bandits who resented the French occupation.

1803–05

From May 1803, when Britain again declared war, the Swiss units would be rejuvenated with soldiers from the now-defunct Helvetian Republic forces. The 1st Swiss Demi-Brigade, commanded by Col Perrier, moved to Boulogne to prepare for an invasion of England. In 1804 it was transferred to Rochefort, and the nearby Île d'Oleron off the Atlantic coast. Napoleon instructed Berthier that 'you will inform them that

Table 2: Facing colours of Demi-Brigades

Unit	Coat	Collar	Lapels	Cuffs	Cuff flaps	Shoulder strap	Pocket	Buttons
1798–1803: **Demi-Brigades 1–6**[1]	Blue	Red (yellow)	Yellow (red)	Yellow (red)	Green (yellow)	Green (yellow)	Blue (yellow)	Yellow
1803–1805: **1st Demi-Brigade**	Red	Red (blue)	White (blue)	White (blue)	Red (blue)	Red (blue)	Red (blue)	White
2nd Demi-Brigade	Red (white)	Red (white)	Blue (white)	Blue (white)	Red (white)	Red (white)	Red (white)	White
3rd Demi-Brigade	Red	Red (sky blue)	Yellow (sky blue)	Yellow (sky blue)	Red (sky blue)	Red (sky blue)	Red (sky blue)	White

Notes:
1. Waistcoats & breeches were originally blue, but were white by 1800; the demi-brigades were distinguished by their unit number on their button. Piping colours are given in (brackets). 2. Grenadiers probably had either red piping or epaulettes.

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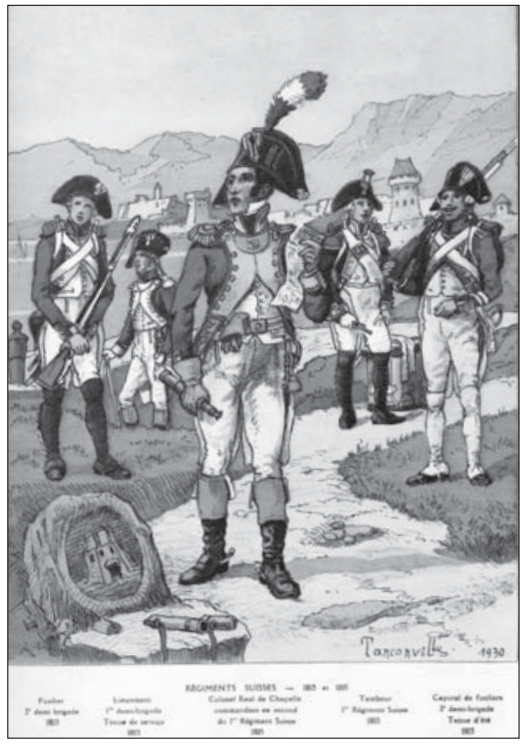
it [is] not for the purpose of embarkation'; however, on 29 April 1804 one company of fusiliers and two of grenadiers (366 men) went aboard the *Algésiras* and *Achille*, which sailed to join Adm Villeneuve's squadron on his passage to the Caribbean. Of these, 115 men were landed on the island of Guadeloupe; the others sailed back to Europe, and were still aboard the following year for the battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805. The 1st Demi-Brigade was officially dissolved at Rochefort on 10 May 1805. The 500 men who remained on the Île d'Oleron would form the nucleus of the 3rd Battalion of the new 1st Swiss Regiment, and were transferred to Modena in northern Italy. Those men who had survived their Atlantic service disembarked at Cadiz, and made their way to join the 1st Battalion of that regiment.

In May 1803 the 2nd Demi-Brigade, commanded by Col Louis de Watteville, and numbering 1,230 men after absorbing the Helvetian light battalion under Clavel, moved into southern Italy. One battalion was sent to the Adriatic coast, while the other two marched on to occupy the ports of Bari and Taranto. In May 1805, Col de Watteville was dismissed (according to Schaller, for 'some very unpleasant matters'), and replaced by Col Clavel. The demi-brigade was dissolved at Livorno on 17 June 1805, and under Clavel its men would make up the 4th Bn of the new 1st Swiss Regt, based at Genoa.



A collection of figures by Tanconville, from *Le Passepoil* (1930), illustrating soldiers from all three Swiss demi-brigades in 1803. Recruits wore the bicorne, which persisted in the 1st Swiss until replaced by the shako in late 1806. In the foreground is LtCol Chapelle, who became the second-in-command of the 1st Swiss Regt; compare with Plate A1. In 1804–05 a couple of hundred men from the 1st Demi-Brigade served aboard two French warships of Adm Villeneuve's squadron, and were present at the battle of Trafalgar. This led to a claim that a Swiss musket ball was responsible for mortally wounding Adm Lord Nelson, but in fact neither of the relevant ships engaged HMS *Victory*. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

On Corsica the 3rd Demi-Brigade, commanded by Col Raguettly, was meanwhile gaining plaudits; Gen Morand, the garrison commander, reported that they were 'motivated by the best spirit' and would 'soon be capable of rivalling the best demi-brigades of the Republic.' However, on 5 February 1803 the 635 men of its 1st Bn – clad in their new red uniforms – embarked for the fever-ridden Caribbean island of St Domingue. In 1798 rebellious black slaves in what is now Haiti had overthrown French rule, and in February 1802 Napoleon – taking advantage of the brief peace with Britain, which removed the threat of the Royal Navy from the sea-lanes – had sent 28,000 men across the Atlantic to re-establish French authority. While the slave leader Toussaint L'Ouverture was amongst the prisoners taken, many of his black soldiers fought on in the hills. (Captured slaves were transported to Corsica, and from their number Col Raguettly recruited 12 to be sappers in his 3rd Demi-Brigade.) By March 1803, when the Swiss arrived, the French army had been catastrophically ravaged by yellow fever, to the extent that only 9,000 men remained. The Swiss would suffer the same fate, and a mere seven men of the battalion would eventually return to Bordeaux.

On 26 March 1803, news that Muller's 2nd Line Bn of Helvetian troops were also to be sent out to the Caribbean caused violent protests in Berne; a French soldier was killed, and a riot broke out in the barracks. The Landamann d'Affry (the Swiss head of state) wrote to Gen Ney, the French representative in Switzerland, condemning these 'reprehensible excesses', and a Swiss grenadier was executed. Ney noted that the Landamann addressed the recruits, which 'seemed to have an impression on them'; however, many were deserting, especially after news of the deployment to

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OPPOSITE PAGE
This diagram shows the rather convoluted method by which a number of Swiss units were eventually transformed into the 1st Swiss Regiment.

the Caribbean, because in his opinion the units were composed of 'outcasts whom everyone turned away from the family home.'

In the event the 2nd Line Bn were spared the virtual death sentence of a posting to the Caribbean, and shipped instead to the Mediterranean island of Elba, since the resumption of war with Britain meant that control of the Atlantic sea-lanes had been lost once again. Recruits from De Bons' 1st and Muller's 2nd Line Bns of Helvetian troops became the new 3rd Bn of the 3rd Demi-Brigade; the old 3rd Bn became its 2nd, and the 2nd was renumbered the 1st Battalion. When the 3rd Demi-Brigade was dissolved in 1805, the new 3rd Bn on Elba would become the 2nd Bn of the 1st Swiss Regiment, and the troops on Corsica would make up its 1st Battalion.

Uniforms – see Commentaries to Plates A and B, and Table 2

BELOW
A recruiting poster for the Swiss regiments; to encourage volunteers, Napoleon offered generous terms of service, and fixed the initial enlistment period at four years. Recruits had to be between 18 and 40 years of age, and at least 5ft 2in (1.57m) tall. In March 1807 the lack of recruits prompted the federal magistrate in Zurich to tell the cantons that failure to serve would be an offence against common law. (Musée Militaire Vaudois, Morges)

Bekanntmachung.

Zweytes Schweitzer-Regiment; von Castella von Balens, Obrist; zu Avignon in Besatzung.

PROCLAMATION.

2.e RÉGIMENT SUISSE, DE CASTELLA-DE BALENS COLONEL, EN GARNISON A AVIGNON

Schweitzer Jünglinge!

JEUNESSE SUISSE!

FORMATION OF THE SWISS REGIMENTS

Although the four new regiments were authorized by articles signed on 27 November 1803, it was not until 5 July 1805 that the 1st Regiment was actually formed by decree, with the others following on 12 September 1806. Napoleon took pains over their formation, demanding that the French rather than the Swiss authorities select officers, and personally appointing those above the rank of major. He also had to approve all grenadier-company officers, from names put forward by the Colonel-General of the Swiss (a French appointment, held in 1808 by Marshal Lannes). To ensure that Switzerland did not evolve military institutions that would attract volunteers away from his Swiss regiments, Napoleon forbade the development of Swiss military academies or a general staff, and limited the home forces to a self-defence militia of no more than 20,000 men.

In 1805, the emperor directed his minister to 'write to the Landamann, write to the colonels; use M. de Maillardoz [the representative of the Confederation in Paris] a lot. Don't let us be short of money! I mainly rely on these regiments to defend the French coast.' On 18 May 1807, Napoleon told the Landamann that the units should be 'composed of citizens of the area, with no admixture of deserters or other foreigners.' It was 'not the number of soldiers that take up arms, but their fidelity and their good attitude' that mattered to him. He 'wanted my Swiss units to be composed of Swiss, who are known for their loyalty, and not of my enemies.'

Even though most recruits came from the disbanded Swiss demi-brigades, the 1st Swiss Regt in northern Italy, Corsica and Elba was not declared fully operational until 4 July 1806 – and even then, with only 2,887 men, to be increased by piecemeal arrivals from Switzerland over the following months. Colonel

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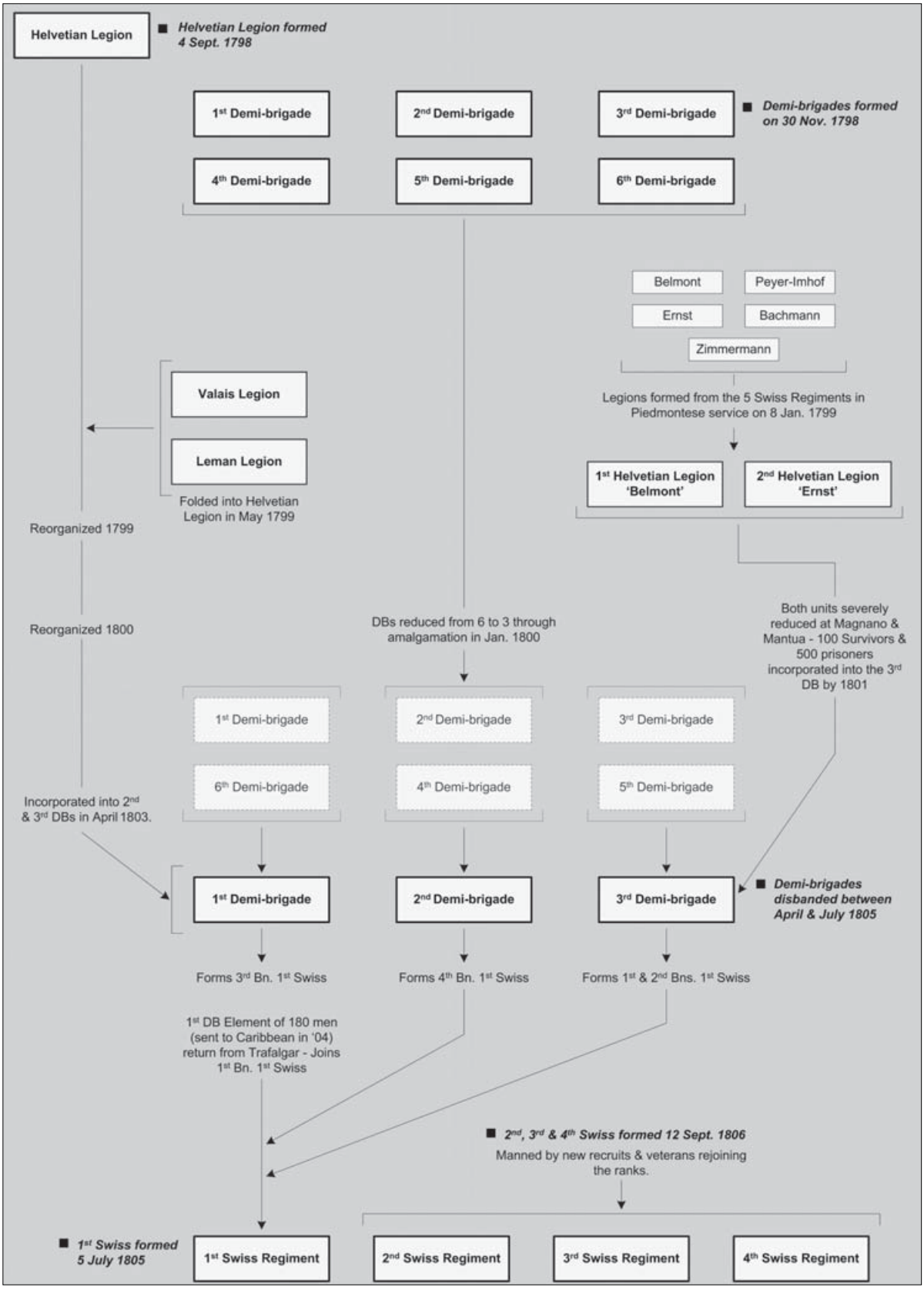
Helvetian Legion
Helvetian Legion formed 4 Sept. 1798
1st Demi-brigade
2nd Demi-brigade
3rd Demi-brigade
Demi-brigades formed on 30 Nov. 1798
4th Demi-brigade
5th Demi-brigade
6th Demi-brigade
Belmont
Peyer-Imhof
Ernst
Bachmann
Zimmermann
Legions formed from the 5 Swiss Regiments in Piedmontese service on 8 Jan. 1799
Valais Legion
Leman Legion
Folded into Helvetian Legion in May 1799
1st Helvetian Legion 'Belmont'
2nd Helvetian Legion 'Ernst'
Reorganized 1799
Reorganized 1800
DBs reduced from 6 to 3 through amalgamation in Jan. 1800
Both units severely reduced at Magnano & Mantua - 100 Survivors & 500 prisoners incorporated into the 3rd DB by 1801
1st Demi-brigade
2nd Demi-brigade
3rd Demi-brigade
6th Demi-brigade
4th Demi-brigade
5th Demi-brigade
Incorporated into 2nd & 3rd DBs in April 1803.
1st Demi-brigade
2nd Demi-brigade
3rd Demi-brigade
Demi-brigades disbanded between April & July 1805
Forms 3rd Bn. 1st Swiss
Forms 4th Bn. 1st Swiss
Forms 1st & 2nd Bns. 1st Swiss
1st DB Element of 180 men (sent to Caribbean in '04) return from Trafalgar - Joins 1st Bn. 1st Swiss
2nd, 3rd & 4th Swiss formed 12 Sept. 1806
Manned by new recruits & veterans rejoining the ranks.
1st Swiss formed 5 July 1805
1st Swiss Regiment
2nd Swiss Regiment
3rd Swiss Regiment
4th Swiss Regiment

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Reproduction of a battalion Eagle standard of the 3rd Swiss Regiment. In March 1807 the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Bns of the 3rd Swiss each received one Eagle and one colour. In Spain in 1808 the 1st Bn's Eagle would be rescued from the disaster of Baylen; however, in 1810 that of the 2nd Bn would be lost at Pueblo de Sanabria. (Erwin Schaffner)

Raguettly, the former commander of the 3rd Demi-Brigade, was appointed to command the 1st Swiss Regiment.

The formation of the 2nd Swiss in Provence followed between October 1806 and April 1807; only 666 recruits had arrived by 31 January 1807, but another 2,768 joined the ranks by that spring. Lieutenant Louis Bégos – one of five sons of an officer who had served the French *Ancien Régime* before becoming the foreign minister of the Helvetian Republic – joined on 26 March 1807. He had served in the Helvetian light battalion under Clavel, then in the 2nd Demi-Brigade until June 1805, but he wrote that in his new regiment 'most of the officers and men were conscripts who had no prior military experience.'

The 3rd Swiss Regt was formed in the spring of 1807, at Lille in Belgium. A 19-year-old volunteer named Bussy wrote that he had to argue 'like the very devil' to be accepted, because 'I was of a small stature; I wasn't even 5ft tall'; however, 'an officer declared "Since he wants to go, let him go! He will make a good light infantryman."' By the end of 1807, despite such easing of the criteria, only 2,711 men were under arms.

The 4th Swiss Regt got off to a similarly slow start. Its Col Perrier arrived at its base at Rennes in Brittany on 22 November 1806. The first 466 recruits turned up in February and March 1807, but of these 300 had to be sent back after Napoleon heard that many Prussian prisoners of war had been included. He ordered an inspection to 'dismiss on the spot anyone who is Prussian or, more generally, anyone who is not Swiss'. It was not until two years later that the 4th Regt could count 3,902 men under arms.

The Swiss population then included only some 225,000 men of military age (from 16 to 40 years – the average recruit was 23.7 years old);

Table 3: Facing colours of Regiments

Unit	Coat	Collar	Lapels	Cuffs	Cuff flaps	Shoulder strap	Pockets	Turnbacks
1805–1812: **1st Swiss**	Red	Red[1] (blue)	Yellow (blue)	Yellow (blue)	Red (blue)	Red (blue)	Red (blue)	White (blue)
2nd Swiss	Red	Dark blue (yellow)	Dark blue (yellow)	Dark blue (yellow)	Red (yellow)	Red (yellow)	Red (yellow)	White (yellow)
3rd Swiss	Red	Black (white)	Black (white)	Black (white)	Red (white)	Red (white)	Red (white)	White (white)
4th Swiss	Red	Red[2] (sky blue)	Sky blue (white)[3]	Sky blue (white)[3]	Red (white)[3]	Red (white)[3]	Red (white)[3]	White (sky blue)[3]
1812–1814:[4] **1st Swiss**	Red	Yellow[5] (red)	Yellow (yellow)	Yellow (yellow)	Red (red)	Red[6] (yellow)	Red (yellow)	White (white)
2nd Swiss	Red	Dark blue[5] (red)	Dark blue (red)	Dark blue (dark blue)	Dark blue (red)	Red[6] (dark blue)	Red (dark blue)	White (white)
3rd Swiss	Red	Black[5] (red)	Black (red)	Black (black)	White (red)	Red[6] (black)	Red (white)	White (white)
4th Swiss	Red	Sky blue[5] (red)	Sky blue (red)	Sky blue (sky blue)	Sky blue (red)	Red[6] (sky blue)	Red (sky blue)	White (white)

Notes: 1. There are several examples of 1st Swiss troops (not just voltigeurs) with yellow collars (still piped blue)
2. As with the 1st, there is evidence of the collars of the 4th being the same as the facing colour (sky blue piped white, in this case)
3. Though some sources give the piping for the 4th as black, an existing jacket and most contemporary or near-contemporary illustrations all show white piping
4. Uniforms determined by the 'Bardin' regulations as set out on 19 Jan 1812
5. Voltigeur collars were the same for all four regiments after 1812 – chamois, piped red
6. Scarlet epaulettes for all grenadiers (or 'rose madder' for the 2nd), with chamois epaulettes piped with the facing colour for voltigeurs (except the 2nd, which was piped 'chamois')

As in Table 2, piping colours are given in (brackets).

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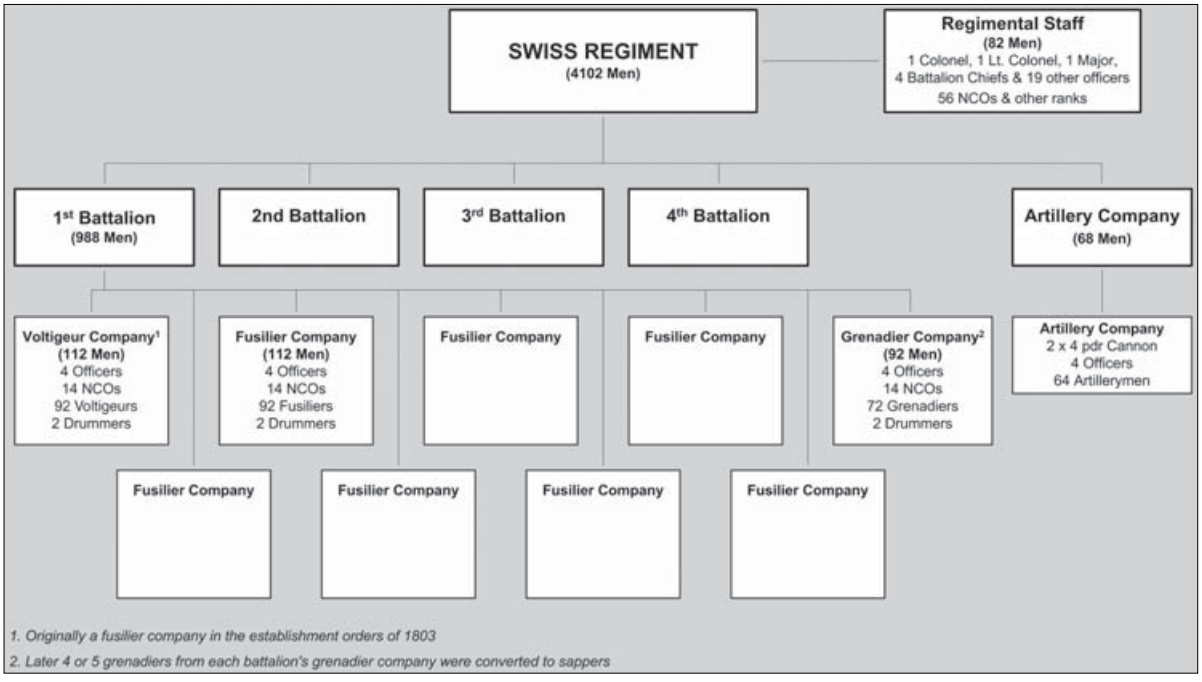

Organization of a Swiss regiment, 1806. The 1803 articles laid out the organization the regiments would adopt when forming between 1805 and 1807, with each battalion consisting of one grenadier and eight fusilier companies. Certainly by 1807, one of the latter had been converted into a voltigeur company.

therefore, if the four regiments were to be at full strength no fewer than 1 in 16 men needed to become a soldier – and that still excluded the notional 20,000 men allowed for the cantonal militias. In December 1807 the Landamann wrote to the cantons explaining the benefits of the French alliance, and stated that maintaining the regiments at full strength was 'a rigorous and urgent obligation.' Maillardoz suggested that cantons be given quotas for recruitment, and this unpopular policy was adopted. The Landamann pointed out that the numbers the cantons said they were providing and those entering the depots did not tally. This was due 'partly to desertions that took place between canton and depot, but especially to the rejection of a fairly large number of recruits that the cantonal authorities had accepted,' and was more prevalent in cantons that had seen a rapid increase in the number of recruits they provided. In 1809, when numbers fell off, d'Affry explained to Talleyrand that the extraordinary effort that had been made in 1807 simply could not be maintained, and conscription would not solve the problem. Certain cantons were stung into action, however, and did organize a press.

Many of the foreign troops that Napoleon recruited found themselves sent to disease-ridden colonies blockaded by the omnipotent Royal Navy, but this was not to be the fate of the new Swiss regiments, since Article 18 of the November 1803 convention stipulated that they could not be asked to serve outside Europe. Even so, such was the size of the contingent envisaged, and the care taken over its selective recruitment, that it is not surprising that the units took some time to become fully operational. The consequence was that while the 1st Regt served complete in one theatre of war from 1805 to 1811, the battalions of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Swiss were deployed piecemeal across Europe.

Uniforms – see Commentaries to Plates C, E and G, and Table 3

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1st SWISS REGIMENT: ITALY, 1805–11

The uniform of Capt Visinaud of the 1st Swiss – see also detail photos accompanying the Plates Commentaries on pages 43-45. For the 1st Regt the uniform remained the same as that of the 3rd DB, with yellow facings piped in blue. Visinaud served as a recruiting officer from 1806 until his retirement, aged 50, in 1810. His old-style coat is a good example of how changes in uniform took some time to percolate through in practice; by 1810 new coats with shorter tails and false turnbacks would be the norm. (Musée Montreux)

In August 1805, Austria and Russia declared war on France once again. In October, after news arrived of Napoleon's success on the Danube, Marshal Masséna advanced and drove the Archduke Charles out of northern Italy. However, an Austrian garrison was left in Venice, and the 4th Bn/ 1st Swiss Regt deployed from Genoa to join its besiegers; their behaviour on 24 November at the battle of Castel-Franco, where they helped to repel an Austrian relief force, prompted Napoleon's viceroy, Eugéne de Beauharnais, to describe them as 'fearless and efficient.'

When the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies sided with Britain, a joint Russo-British force landed at Naples on 20 November. However, Napoleon's decisive defeat of the Russian and Austrian armies at Austerlitz on 2 December led to the hasty re-embarkation of this expedition, leaving Naples to face Napoleon's wrath alone. On 8 February 1806, when Masséna invaded, the 4th Bn/ 1st Swiss formed part of Gen Reynier's II Corps. The French swiftly conquered the mainland, with only the fortress of Gaeta holding out. However, the British sent troops to Sicily, and from there achieved a surprise landing in St Eufemia Bay, threatening to cut off Reynier with one of his divisions in Calabria, the 'toe of Italy'. On 4 July, near the town of Maida, Reynier attempted to drive the British into the sea, but his attack columns were devastated by their firepower.

During the French attack the Swiss initially benefited from some confusion caused by their red uniforms, especially as a British-employed Swiss regiment under Frederic de Watteville was also present. The historian Fortescue described how 'the 78th, mistaking them for Watteville's Swiss, allowed them to approach unharmed within very close range and received from them a very sharp volley… and… actually began to retreat.' However, overall the British line held, and 'after a short struggle the Swiss retired in good order… where they rallied and reformed.' The Swiss held in check a British pursuit while the French made an orderly withdrawal, but their losses were 30 dead, Col Clavel and 53 others captured wounded, and 55 other prisoners. (Several prisoners, including Clavel, were subsequently exchanged, but the commanding officer died from his wounds in July 1808.)

General Reynier, with only 3,000 men, and his supply lines vulnerable to partisan attacks, retreated northwards; the nearest French division was Verdier's at Cassano, some 120 miles away. Instead of pursuing Reynier the British turned south to occupy southern Calabria, but the French march was threatened by local partisans. Again, the red coats of the Swiss caused confusion; Courier, a French officer with the retreating force, described how at Marcellinara and Cassano 'the Swiss battalion marched at the head … seeing this red company, [the people] took us for English.'

When Gaeta finally capitulated on 18 July 1806, King Joseph Bonaparte gave Masséna four additional line regiments to retake Calabria, and on 10 August the marshal achieved a link-up with both Reynier and Verdier at Castrovillari. The 4th Bn/ 1st Swiss, who had marched to Maida 600 strong, had by now been reduced to 256 men, and were sent to Naples to recover; their place was taken by the 3rd Bn, which arrived in that city on 15 August before continuing south to Calabria. The 1st Bn soon followed, sailing from Corsica to land on 6 October, but the regiment's 2nd Bn was retained on Elba until December 1807. The regiment's artillery company

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(organized from the Helvetian artillery company that had been sent to Cherbourg) arrived in Naples on 1 April 1808.

The 1st Bn/ 1st Swiss under Dufresne participated in the successful siege of Crotone in summer 1807, but it was not until February 1808 that the last British and Allied garrisons were expelled from Calabria. The French then dispersed troops all over southern Italy in efforts to suppress the partisans. In May 1808 the 1st Bn took up residence in Reggio, and Maj Dufresne established a camp at Baganara to keep the road into town clear. A prolonged struggle was played out, with supply convoys and patrols under constant threat of ambush; the partisans were elusive opponents, who stood and fought only when numbers and circumstances favoured them. In this difficult combat environment, the Swiss began to carve themselves out an effective reputation.

On 30 July 1806, soon after Maida, Napoleon had told his brother King Joseph: 'The 1st Swiss consists of men who served France and will be loyal to you... You'll have as many Swiss as you require. They are good soldiers, they won't betray you.' Joseph was so impressed that in October 1807 he obtained Napoleon's agreement to transfer the regiment officially into the service of his new Neapolitan Army. On 27 December the Swiss Diet ratified the transfer; but when Joseph was moved to Spain to occupy yet another puppet throne for his brother, his successor as King of Naples, Marshal Joachim Murat, thought the idea demeaning to the Neapolitans, and reversed the decision. Murat nevertheless recognized the value of the Swiss, and in October 1808 he selected elite companies – a company of grenadiers from the 3rd Bn, and one of voltigeurs from the 4th – to take part in a dangerous but successful amphibious operation against the precipitous cliffs of Capri.

By 1 April 1809 the 1st Swiss Regt had an official establishment of 3,034 men, but its effective strength was about 700 fewer. The 1st and 2nd Bns, both in Calabria, had 547 and 544 men respectively; the 3rd, garrisoning Capri, had 613; and the 4th Bn, in Naples, numbered 629 men. (The artillery company was serving at Salerno.) That year the French were again thrown onto the defensive by a stronger amphibious descent on the mainland – by some 18,000 British and Allied troops – which prompted Murat to concentrate his men in the Bay of Naples. In March 1809 all four Swiss battalions were stationed there, but they were not engaged, since the British confined their efforts to occupying the offshore island of Ischia. Despite being spared a battle, many Swiss soldiers succumbed to sickness (well into the 20th century southern Italy was notorious for malaria). By 11 December 1809, regimental strength had decreased to 117 officers (57 fewer than full establishment) and 2,662 men (a shortfall of 1,240). Since its inception the regiment had sustained 555 deaths, many from disease during 1809; but only 84 men had deserted.

Drum-majors of the 1st Swiss, both pictures dated 1810. Left is a depiction of Drum-Major Francois Scarpe, in a plain red uniform with yellow facings. On the right is a drum-major in a blue parade uniform, in a modern painting by Bucquoy after Boeswillwald. Note Scarpe's busby, with its bag and pompon. Formal dress for musicians was usually blue, but for everyday dress red regimentals were probably worn. (Musée Militaire Vaudois, & Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

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This jacket of a corporal from the 1st Swiss conforms, for the most part, to the new 1812 'Bardin' regulations, which replaced the long *habit* coatee with the *habit veste*, a short jacket with plastron-style closed lapels, and short tails with false turnbacks. In this particular case the fringed epaulettes were meant to be red but are still white, and the piping on the cuff flap is yellow instead of the regulation red – good examples of common minor variations in dress. (Musée Militaire Vaudois)

The 1st and 2nd Bns, deployed again to Calabria, continued to assist the Neapolitan forces in combating partisan bands under such leaders as Fra Diavolo and De Benincasa. In this service they were soon joined by the 3rd Bn from Capri; the 4th Bn replaced the 3rd on that island, but would themselves leave for Calabria in February 1811. French policy was to seek to divide the local population from the guerrillas. Monasteries were shut, a curfew was imposed, livestock had to be locked up, and a decree threatened anyone suspected of carrying food to the partisans with the firing-squad. Deprived of supplies, the guerrillas were forced to raid French convoys and depots; the French mounted flying columns, and in many instances the ambushers became the ambushed. Major Dufresne of the 1st Bn was particularly successful around Castrovilli, and was decorated for pacifying the region.

By September 1810 the anti-partisan campaign was proving so effective that Murat was able to turn his attention to an invasion of British-occupied Sicily. For this operation he concentrated 25,000 men, including the 1st and 2nd Bns/ 1st Swiss and the elite companies of the 3rd and 4th Battalions. On 17 September a partial landing was achieved, but the threat from the Royal Navy was enough to deter a large-scale crossing of the straits, and the Swiss were not embarked. In July 1811, with the partisans suppressed and the British confined to Sicily, the regiment began to withdraw from southern Italy; in November, all four battalions marched through Rome in atrocious weather. At the depot at Plaisance the regiment was reorganized into two battalions. The elite companies made a detour to Geneva, where they were acclaimed by townspeople lining the streets. This was a temporary respite, however, as a new war was brewing. The 1st Swiss were withdrawn from Italy and ordered to march to Wesel in Germany, to unite with the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Swiss Regts in preparation for the invasion of Russia.

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THE PENINSULA, 1807–14: 2nd, 3rd & 4th SWISS REGIMENTS

While the 1st Swiss were in Italy, elements of the other Swiss regiments were committed to the unexpected, relentless, and violent war in the Iberian Peninsula, which French historian Georges Blond would describe as 'the fortune of generals, the ruin of officers, and the death of soldiers'.

In October 1807, while the Spanish royal government were subservient clients of Napoleon, he sent Gen Junot with 30,000 men marching across Spain to invade Portugal, Britain's sole remaining ally on the continent. Among them were the 2nd Bn/ 2nd Swiss Regt, and the 1st Bn and 304 men from the 2nd Bn/ 4th Swiss. An arduous march from Bayonne to Lisbon was completed in 35 days, and the Portuguese capital fell without resistance.

In November, Napoleon – who was dismantling the Spanish government by treacherous diplomacy – continued to send troops into Spain, and by March 1808 some 100,000 would have crossed the Pyrenees. Among them was a corps under Gen Dupont that included another two Swiss battalions – the 1st Bn/ 3rd Swiss and 3rd Bn/ 4th, accompanied by Col May, commander of the 3rd Swiss. In January 1808 another French corps under Moncey had moved across the border, with the 1st Bn/ 2nd Swiss accompanied by Col Castella, and the 2nd Bn/ 3rd Swiss. Meanwhile, Gen Duhesme, with the 3rd Bn/ 2nd Swiss among his units, marched on Barcelona. The colonels of all three regiments complained about this chaotic, piecemeal detachment of their battalions, Castella of the 2nd writing that this 'wretched dispersion … paralyses newly-formed corps … discipline suffers because of it.'

Nicolas Antoine Xavier, Count Castella de Berlens (1767–1830), was the colonel of the 2nd Swiss Regt from its creation until he was wounded in Russia, at the second battle of Polotsk in November 1812. In the spring of 1813 Castella was promoted to *général de brigade*. (Private collection)

In May 1808, Napoleon's imprisonment of the Spanish royal family, and his decision to make his brother Joseph the new King of Spain, precipitated a nationwide popular revolt. Contemptuous of the opposition from Spanish regional commands and patriotic *juntas*, Napoleon ordered dispersed corps into the field, including that of Gen Dupont, who marched across La Mancha and the Sierra Morena mountains en route for Cadiz. Most of his units were unimpressive, and among them were two of the six Hispano-Swiss regiments that had been serving in the Spanish Army – Preux, and Reding the Younger – which Dupont had forcibly incorporated into his corps at Madrid. Dupont reached Cordoba on 7 June; resistance was minimal, but he allowed his men to subject the city to savage pillaging.

Baylen, 1808

Popular revolt now ripped through Andalusia. Ahead of Dupont's small army, passes were blocked and bridges were destroyed, and while

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The cross of the Legion of Honour. A typical citation for appointment to the Legion would specify the engagement in which the recipient had distinguished himself. This cross was awarded to Capt De Riaz from the 2nd Swiss for the relief of Puento el Santo in Spain, a village surrounded for three days in November 1811 by a strong force of guerrillas. On another occasion during that month this daring officer had rushed out on a horse and rescued an Imperial Guard soldier abducted from the gates of Rio Seco, who otherwise would doubtless have suffered a horrible death. (Musée Militaire Vaudois, Morges)

hostile forces behind him threatened to cut him off from the north, Gen Castanos with about 33,000 Andalusian troops advanced from Seville to meet him. At first Dupont remained passive at Andujar, but in July he belatedly ordered a retreat, detaching the division under Gen Vedel – including 3rd Bn/ 4th Swiss – to clear the mountain roads ahead of him. This left Baylen, a town in the Guadalquivir valley straddling the line of retreat, undefended. At 3am on the morning of 19 July, a voltigeur from the Swiss unit who had crossed the Rumblar river brought Dupont the shocking news that a Spanish division under the Swiss Gen Théodore de Reding (which included the Hispano-Swiss regiment Reding the Older) had occupied the town, thus blocking his retreat.

Dupont, with only some 11,000 infantry under his hand, had to force a way through the enemy to his front while Castanos's army was closing in from behind him. In desperation, he deployed his units straight off the march, and the 3rd Bn/ 4th Swiss went into action at 1pm on the blazing hot afternoon of 19 July. Captain Landolt from Zurich described how 'two Spanish lines were penetrated but, weak and extremely exhausted, we had to withdraw.' The final blow fell when Col Schramm, commanding Dupont's press-ganged Hispano-Swiss brigade, was wounded, and his 1,400 men changed sides. Clashes continued until 22 June, when Dupont – offered repatriation for his men by the Spanish – surrendered.

Although they at one stage refused to fight Reding's Hispano-Swiss regiment, the 3rd Bn/ 4th Swiss were heavily engaged in the battle, and suffered 300 casualties – perhaps 10 per cent of the French total. Dupont reportedly sent word to Gen Vedel, commanding his detached and unengaged division, to retreat independently, but under Spanish threats of reprisals against the prisoners he too was persuaded to surrender. Colonel May protested this decision, but in vain; thus 1st Bn/ 3rd Swiss, serving in Poinsol's brigade of this division, also fell into captivity. Before leaving France this unit had been reinforced with men from the 2nd Bn, and according to its Maj Weber it was 'the elite of the regiment, robust men who had resisted the malign influences of the climate and the atmosphere of the north coast.' (One company of 122 men led by *Chef de battalion* d'Affry refused to lay down their arms, and managed to make their way back to Madrid with their battalion's Eagle; they later joined their regiment's 2nd Battalion.) Among the prisoners, the Swiss Capt de Muralt wrote that 'when our march brought us to a town, the whole population swarmed at us, the men hitting us, the women spitting in our faces, the children crying out insults.'

In fact the Spanish broke the terms of Dupont's surrender, and French and Swiss prisoners were either incarcerated on prison hulks in Cadiz harbour, or transported to the Balearic Islands and abandoned on the desolate, uninhabited island of Cabrera. Some of the officers would later escape from Cadiz when Marshal Soult laid siege to the town. On 15 May 1810, prisoners on board the hulk *Old Castile* overpowered their guards and cut the cables; six Swiss captains and 11 lieutenants were among the 943 officers who regained their freedom, and were presented to King Joseph in Madrid before returning to their units. Other daring escapers included the flag-bearer from 1st Bn/ 3rd Swiss, and a party of 40 Swiss soldiers, who seized boats and reached North Africa. The Swiss authorities tried in vain to arrange a prisoner exchange, and many of the captives on Cabrera died from malnutrition. In July 1810 the Royal Navy

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transported the NCOs and officers to England, where the latter gave their parole and were repatriated. Colonel May, whose brother was an officer in the British service, returned to France after giving his word that he would not again serve actively; he remained titular commander of the 3rd Swiss, but stayed at the depot. The surviving enlisted men held on Cabrera and on the Cadiz hulks were only released in April 1814.

Portugal, 1808–09

With Spain ablaze behind him and communications with Madrid cut off, Gen Junot had no prospect of relief or reinforcement. In an attempt to keep the road home open he spread his units between a few vital 'hedgehog' positions across central Portugal. While Swiss fusiliers were kept as garrison troops (those from the 2nd Swiss at Elvas, near the Spanish frontier town of Badajoz, and those from the 4th Swiss at Peniche on the Atlantic coast), the grenadiers were used in the field. After Gen Sir Arthur Wellesley's British expedition landed at Mondego Bay on 1 August, De Laborde's division, which included the grenadiers of the 4th Swiss, marched north to meet him. The two forces clashed on 17 August at Roliça; there a British officer from the 29th Foot derided the performance of the Swiss, commenting that some, 'either as a ruse or in earnest, called out that they were poor Swiss, and did not wish to fight against the English.' However, out of the 200 men present, 37 were recorded as killed and 27 wounded (over 25 per cent of those involved), which suggests that the Swiss grenadiers in fact fought with determination.

Junot assembled reinforcements to contest Wellesley's southwards march on Lisbon at Vimiero on 21 August, but the massed firepower of Wellesley's battalions drove off poorly co-ordinated attacks by the French, including a final attempt by a reserve composed of grenadiers. Swiss grenadier companies commanded by Capt Bleuler participated fully, and were recorded as losing a further 30 killed and 45 wounded. Junot sought terms, and, by the notorious Convention of Cintra negotiated by Wellesley's superiors, the British generously agreed to repatriate all his men to France. Those sent home included the fusiliers of the 2nd Swiss from Elvas, who had experienced the same dangers from guerrillas as their comrades in Spain. Soldiers were being murdered; of one occasion, Lt Bégos wrote that 'deciding to exact vengeance for the abominable crime, and armed with my double-barrelled gun, I aimed with great joy from about 120 paces at one of these brigands; on approaching him I assured myself that he was certainly dead.' Besieged in September by Spanish regulars, the Swiss refused to surrender until a British force reached Elvas on 1 October, and the companies of the 4th Swiss at Peniche had also been lucky enough to fall into British captivity. Whereas the repatriated men from the 2nd Swiss stayed in France, those from the 4th Regt would soon return to Portugal.

In November 1808, Napoleon himself led massive reinforcements into Spain on his way to retake Madrid. The 1st Bn/ 2nd Swiss and the 2nd Bn/ 3rd formed a provisional regiment under Col Castella in Soult's II Corps,

A contemporary study of a sapper of the 3rd Swiss by Lang, who painted a set of figures from this regiment all with black facings on collars, cuffs, and lapels, piped white. This sapper has four sets of gold crossed axes down each arm. His axe is somewhat unusual; note the rather odd haft and 'battleaxe'-style blade, rather than the more workaday felling axe normally carried by sappers. His bearskin has a black-tipped red plume and a white tassel and flounder. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

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Another contemporary picture by Lang showing a drummer of the 3rd Swiss. Drummers usually wore blue coats, but there are examples of red being worn, as here. He has 'swallow's-nests' on the shoulders, five yellow chevrons down each sleeve, and a yellow band around the top of the shako. Note particularly the 3rd's regimental peculiarity of the shako cockade, pompon, and cord tassel being set off-centre to the man's left – see also Plate G3. The barrel of the drum is yellow metal, and the bands are shown as red and silver-grey. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

which was soon pursuing Gen Sir John Moore's British corps across northern Spain. Voltigeur Bussy described excessive rains, followed by falling snow that drifted 3ft deep. Unable to keep up with the pursuit, and with battalion strengths of only 350 and 230 men respectively, the Swiss missed the battle of Corunna on 16 January 1809, which immediately preceded the British evacuation. That same month the provisional regiment, reinforced with the repatriated elements of the 4th Swiss as well as an additional 341 men from that regiment's 2nd Bn, advanced into northern Portugal. On 29 March 1809 the city of Oporto was successfully stormed, with the Swiss grenadier companies at the forefront.

The French hold on the city was to be brief, however. On 12 May, Gen Wellesley – now returned with reinforcements, and with the Portuguese Army under command – attacked successfully across the Douro river. Soult's corps were forced to retreat along mountain tracks into Spain; Portuguese militia harassed them every mile of the way, and they took a brutal revenge on Portuguese villages. Voltigeur Bussy wrote that 'a large number of stragglers clog the paths… the nights are cold and we dare not light fires. After 5 days of retreat we reach Orense, where we enter, routed and starving, unable to carry on due to fatigue.' They found little respite there, and Bussy finally arrived at Lugo,

> barefoot, dressed in bad canvas trousers and a wretched overcoat taken from the English. Since Orense, I've had 12 days without the shirt on my back ever being dry, and 5 days without food. I feel really weak and do not know if I will be able to make my notes. We find some supplies in a village: some sausages, some bread and some good red wine, which bucks me up.

The Swiss voltigeur tried making some shoes out of fresh cowhide, but wrote that 'these shoes damaged my feet… I prefer to walk barefoot.' After the retreat Bussy, suffering from dysentery and fever, rested in a convent for six days, but remembered nothing of his time there.

As in Calabria, those who had managed to keep their red jackets had been the means of identifying potential enemies. A French veteran named Naylies recorded how the inhabitants of Allaris 'mistook the men of the 3rd Swiss for British soldiers. They pressed food and wine on them, hailed them as liberators, and hurled a thousand curses at the French... the arrival of our [French] infantry caused the people to discover their error, and they thereupon hid their enthusiasm for a better occasion.'

Occupation, 1809–14

Once recovered, the Swiss battalions joined the forces in Leon province in northern Spain, their mission being to guarantee supply lines from France against guerrilla attack. A welcome reinforcement came when the 4th Bn/ 4th Swiss, who had left Rennes on 6 December 1809, reached Spain on 22 February 1810. For Bussy, there was another arrival of equal importance that month:

> A load of clothing arrives from Lille. We are given an outfit, white canvas trousers for dress uniform, cords for the shakos and a greatcoat of a good grey woollen cloth, two shirts to

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replace those that we stole from the peasants. Here we are this time kitted out like gentlemen.

In Spain, guarding supply lines was no idle duty. On the night of 7 June 1810, a Spaniard opened the gates of Leon city – which was garrisoned by 300 Swiss – and 1,500 guerrillas rushed inside. The voltigeurs of 3rd Swiss, Bussy amongst them, were the first to react; in the fighting for control of the town square their Capt Hundbliss was killed. The grenadier company under Capt Donatz joined the fray, and all the attackers were either captured or driven off. In a tribute to the reputation of the Swiss elite companies Gen Kellerman, the provincial commander in Leon, formed a special personal guard of men from their ranks.

Attacks on smaller, more isolated garrisons were common. On 21 November 1811, at Puento el Santo, 50 men of the 2nd Swiss under Capt Salis barricaded themselves into a fortified house and a church steeple and repelled guerrilla attacks for three days, before Capt De Riaz arrived with a relief column. The peril had been real; for instance, on 3 August 1810, no fewer than 333 men from 3rd Swiss, commanded by Maj von Graffenreid and including Voltigeur Bussy, had been surrounded by several thousand Spanish and Portuguese troops in Puebla de Sanabria, a town near the Portuguese border. Taking refuge in a large fortified house, the Swiss had little water and were low on ammunition; 48 soldiers including 20 grenadiers, promised repatriation to Switzerland by their attackers, deserted during the siege. On 10 August, when two mines made a breach in the wall, Graffenreid surrendered under the same terms, and the 2nd Bn's Eagle standard was taken. Unbeknown to him, a relief force was only 24 hours away.

This time the offer of repatriation was honoured, probably because custody had been transferred to the British, who expected that most of the prisoners would enlist in one of their own Swiss regiments, De Roll. Only about 100 took up the offer (Bussy included); another 113 refused, and embarked at Corunna on ships for France. Graffenreid wrote a personal apology to Napoleon, and was exonerated by court martial; however, those who deserted during the siege were condemned to death in absentia. Lieutenant-Colonel Thomasset, who had taken over command of the Swiss provisional regiment from Castella in 1809, wrote to the Landamann that this incident could be fatal to the good name of the Swiss. Voltigeur Bussy for a time joined the British 60th Foot, and was sent to the Isle of Wight. He also

A notable illustration by Lang of an officer from the 3rd Swiss in '*tenue de route*' or campaign dress. His shako, wrapped in protective oilskin, has a brass-edged visor and chinscales, and a disc-shaped pompon off-set to the left-hand side. He wears epaulettes and – perhaps unusually for such a practical order of dress – his gorget; he carries a fusilier officer's epée from a shoulder belt, and also what appears to be a local gourd or water bottle. The jacket has curiously shaped lapels, crudely resembling the British fashion for partially buttoning them across. The trousers are mid-grey reinforced with black leather patches, worn over grey-black gaiters and hob-nailed walking boots. The blue-and-white polka-dot cravat is certainly not a common French affectation, but many Swiss officers had served in one or more European armies, and were thus exposed to a variety of styles of dress. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

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A portrait of a captain of grenadiers from the 4th Swiss, 1810. The buttons around the cuff are unusual, but accord with other contemporary pictures of officers of this regiment, including Bleuler. Also distinctive are his blue breeches, which could be worn for everyday dress. The plume on his bearskin is red, and his lace and buttons are gold. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

passed through the British Swiss depot at Lymington, Hampshire, where he came across 120 former soldiers from the 2nd and 4th Swiss Regiments.

By August 1810, the 2nd and 3rd Swiss were providing three companies each to a combined battalion; men from the 1st, 2nd and 4th Bns/ 4th Swiss were also combined at Valladolid into a single unit. (All three regiments sent back surplus officer and NCO cadres to their depots in France.) This made in total a force of some 1,000 Swiss soldiers available. Colonel Perrier wrote to Napoleon that of those Swiss who had deserted from the Spanish or were taken prisoner by the French, 'a large part enlist in the different corps that France is raising among those prisoners.' He wanted permission to obtain 'all those who would be recognized by the colonels… this measure would procure more than 1,000 men for the three regiments.' Many Swiss re-enlisted in this way; nevertheless, numbers continued to dwindle, and by the end of 1811 a single combined battalion of only 680 men remained. On 4 January 1813 these soldiers – predominantly from the 4th Swiss – were ordered back to France; the few remaining men left from the 2nd Swiss in Catalonia did not return until early 1814.

VALAIS AND NEUCHÂTEL BATTALIONS

Valais Battalion

The Valais region in south-west Switzerland included the strategically important Simplon and Great St Bernard passes. Napoleon encouraged those elements in Valais who wanted to break away from the Confederation, and in 1802 the region gained independence under the protection of France. Over the next three years the French paid for the Simplon Pass to be upgraded from a mule track to a cobbled road. In return, on 4 October 1805 Valais agreed to recruit a battalion of infantry for service with the French Army – five companies including one of grenadiers, totalling 661 officers and men. On 10 July 1806 command was given to M. de Bons – a professional soldier who, like many others, had served in the Swiss regiments of the former French monarchy.

Napoleon demanded that the men should be genuine volunteers, who signed up initially for four years' service. Consequently, recruitment suffered the same delays as for the Swiss regiments. Valais was already providing 1,500 men to the Swiss regiments in the Spanish army (many served under Gen Dupont at Baylen, in the Preux Regiment), and 600 more were serving in the home-defence militia. Consequently, in 1807 Napoleon reduced company establishment from 129 to 83 men, but imposed a final deadline of 1 May for the unit to be ready, on pain of Valais losing its independence. His demand was met, and late in 1807 an inspection elicited high praise from Gen Pille, who described the men as 'very good looking and very tall; the company of grenadiers is superb.'

In July 1808 the battalion marched into eastern Spain as part of Gen Reille's division, linking up with Gen Duhesme in Barcelona, and thereafter serving in the siege of Gerona, where battalion detachments

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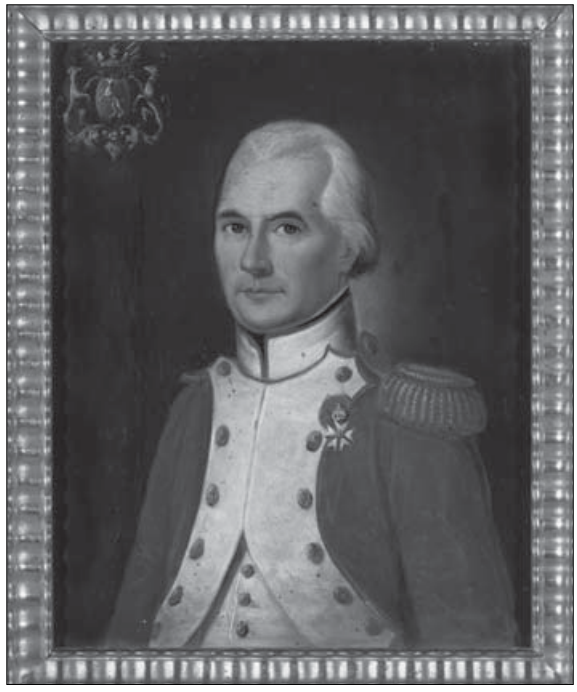
built entrenchments and guarded batteries. The unit – like the rest of Reille's force – suffered the steady attrition that was unavoidable during summertime siege operations, and by mid-August it had already been reduced to 235 men fit for duty. Giving up the siege, Reille retreated to Barcelona.

In November 1808 offensive operations recommenced after two more French divisions under Gen St Cyr were committed to the region. The Valais Battalion was deployed to Rosas Bay, and on 5 December captured the fortress there. On 25 February 1809 the Spanish blockade of Barcelona was finally lifted, and between May and December the battalion was involved in a second siege of Gerona. Again the unit experienced severe attrition, recording 30 per cent losses. On 7 December 1809, when a final desperate sortie was attempted by the garrison, the battalion stood its ground; Spanish resistance collapsed, and the town surrendered three days later.

Over the following year the Valais Battalion carried out anti-guerrilla operations from various bases in Catalonia. Despite regular replacement drafts, and volunteers from among captured Swiss who had been serving in the Spanish Army, the battalion's strength had dwindled to only 200 men by the end of 1810. On 12 November 1810 Napoleon annexed Valais to France, renaming the region the Department of the Simplon Pass. The soldiers of the battalion were required to swear loyalty to their new ruler, which – according to the French general who conducted the ceremony – they did with enthusiasm. The battalion ceased to exist as an independent Swiss unit, being incorporated into the new French 11th Light Infantry Regiment, and in February 1811 it marched to its new depot at Wesel in Germany. Along with the four Swiss regiments, it would serve with Oudinot's II Corps for the invasion of Russia.

***Chef de bataillon* De Bons was nominated as commander of the Valais Battalion on 10 July 1806, having previously served the French *Ancien Régime* in the Swiss Regiment de Courten. In 1808, at the age of 52, he was wounded during the siege of Gerona in Spain, and returned to the regimental depot. (Musée d'Histoire, Sion)**



Uniforms – see Commentary to Plate D

Neuchâtel Battalion

In 1806 the principality of Neuchâtel, in north-west Switzerland, was ceded to France by defeated Prussia. In March that year Napoleon rewarded his chief-of-staff Marshal Berthier by proclaiming him Prince of Neuchâtel. The emperor asked him to provide a battalion of infantry to serve in the Imperial Guard, and a decree dated 11 May 1807 established this unit with six companies (including one each of grenadiers and voltigeurs) each 160 men strong. It was to be raised from volunteers drawn from across Switzerland, and officers' appointments were confirmed personally by Berthier. The battalion was organized at Besançon, but – again – recruitment was slow, and Napoleon threatened its amalgamation with the Valais Battalion. In April 1808 the unit was transferred to Le Havre in Normandy. On 27 August a combined artillery and engineer company was added to the battalion, composed of 4 officers, 14 NCOs, 32 artillerymen crewing 2x 6-pdr cannon, 16 artillery

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train drivers and 16 sappers. By December 1808 a total of 25 officers and 762 men were serving with the battalion. In April 1809 they marched to the Danube, destined for a role in the protection of the Imperial Headquarters during the Austrian campaign. The unit arrived late, but did participate in the crossing of the Danube that culminated in the victory over Archduke Charles at Wagram on 6 July.

The following year, with 200 new recruits incorporated, the Neuchâtel Battalion marched to northern Spain, where they would spend two years serving with the Army of the North. Stationed initially at Burgos and then at Salamanca, the unit subsequently joined IX Corps, which was guarding the Portuguese-Spanish border from the British. During a raid into Portugal in September 1811, as part of Gen Thiebault's division of the Army of Portugal, the battalion held its own in an exchange of musketry with the British Fusilier Brigade at Aldea da Ponte. The battalion was sustained by drafts from Neuchâtel, despite many men leaving after the completion of their four-year enlistments. It was withdrawn from Spain in March 1812 – too late to participate in the initial advance into Russia, but not too late to be caught up in the horrors of the retreat.

The unit arrived at the major supply depot of Smolensk on 7 October, and waited there until 14 November, when Napoleon's army from Moscow began to reach the city. Discipline collapsed as desperate men plundered the stores, and the battalion was not unaffected by this breakdown; it had reached the city with 661 men but left with only 483, marching with the Imperial Guard. With them, at Krasnoi it advanced through a hail of artillery fire from Russian forces either side of the road; during the continuing actions of 14–18 November the Grande Armée lost some 13,000 killed and 26,000 captured. The remnants of the army pushed on, and two weeks later reached the Beresina river. The Neuchâtel Battalion deployed on the west bank to defend the bridgehead opposite Studienka; it was not heavily engaged, but cold, starvation and exhaustion had done their work, and by 19 December only 13 officers and 7 soldiers answered the roll-call.

By late summer of 1813 enough replacements had arrived for the battalion to take its place with the rebuilt army as Berthier's escort. By mid-October the Allied armies were closing in on Napoleon at Leipzig, and on the last day of that climactic battle the Neuchâtel Battalion fought with the rearguard. After the retreat into France in winter 1813–14 the last few veterans remaining were incorporated into a new headquarters company, continuing to serve until Napoleon's first abdication. The battalion was officially disbanded in June 1814.

Uniforms – see Commentary to Plate F

THE SWISS REGIMENTS IN RUSSIA, 1812

Reorganizations, 1811 & 1812

Constant campaigning since 1805 had taken its toll. Even in Holland, where the 3rd and 4th Bns/ 3rd Swiss were posted, at any one time about one third of the men were in hospital suffering from the fever that was

(continued on page 33)

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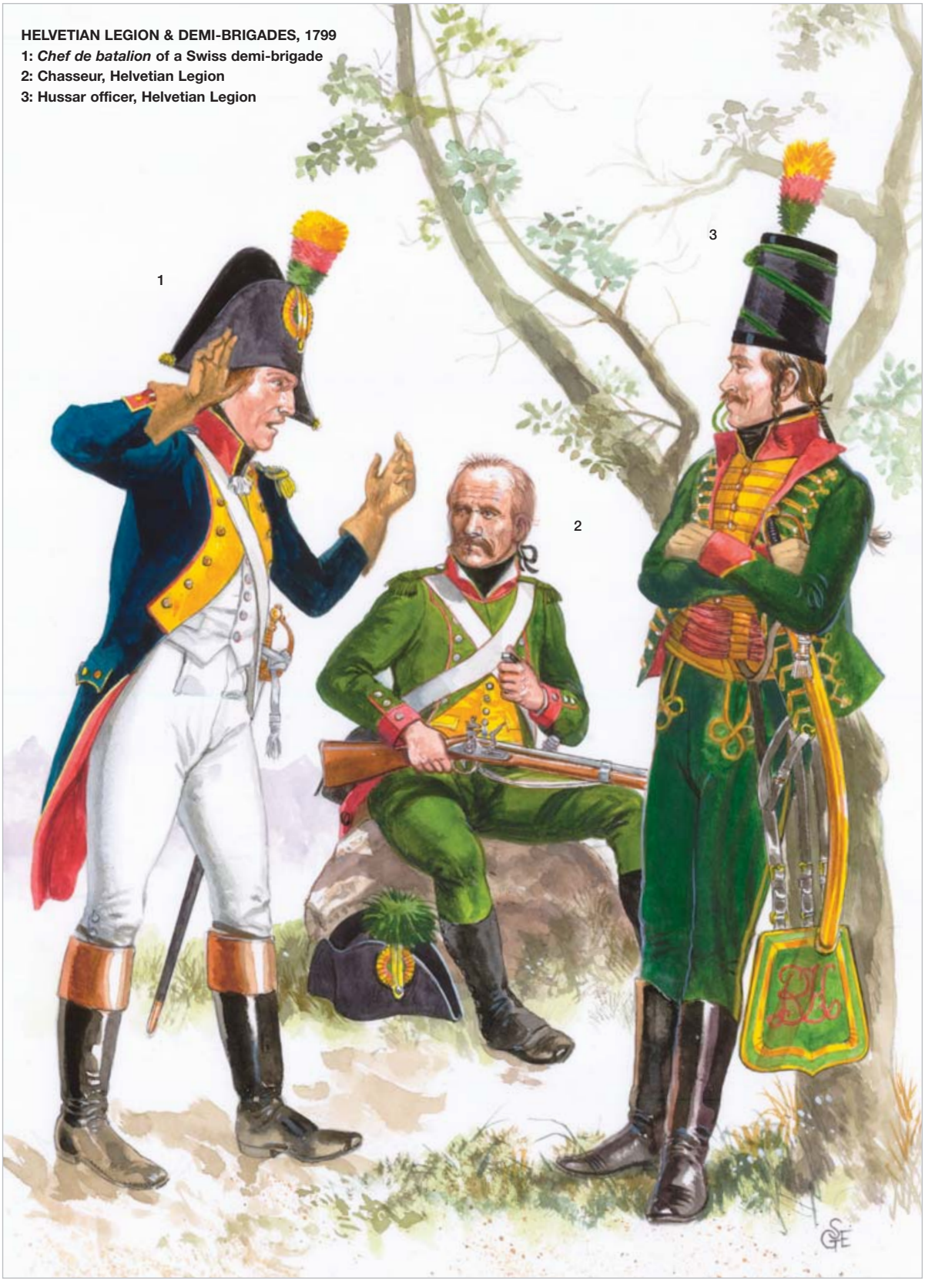

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VALAIS BATTALION; SPAIN, 1808–09
1: Grenadier corporal
2: Captain of grenadier company
3: *Chef de bataillon* Pierre-Joseph Blanc

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NEUCHÂTEL BATTALION; POLAND, SUMMER 1812

1: Sapper sergeant

2: Voltigeur

3: Senior officer

F

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4th SWISS REGIMENT; HOLLAND, WINTER 1813–14
1: Grenadier
2: Fusilier officer
3: Voltigeur

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endemic on that unhealthy coast; Thomasset wrote that 'we suffered cruelly in Zealand, where we lost nearly 500 men.' All the regiments also experienced varying degrees of desertion. From 1805 to 1813, of the 6,324 men who joined the 3rd Swiss, 917 are recorded as having deserted; and during 1807–10 the 2nd Regt lost 1,572 deserters. The Helvetian Diet ratified a severe military penal code; one punishment was three years' hard labour and a fine of 1,500 francs, and another, eight days in irons and a further three months' imprisonment. However, an Imperial amnesty seemed to work best; when this was granted on 25 March 1810, approximately a quarter of all deserters returned to the colours.

Chapelle, the lieutenant-colonel of the 1st Swiss, wrote to the Landamann that recruits now included 'foreigners, deserters and vagabonds who would dishonour the Swiss nation.' In 1810, disturbances at Marseilles between Swiss and French soldiers led to the 2nd Swiss being relocated; Napoleon wrote to Minister of War Clarke that examples should be made of the troublemakers. In March 1811 another incident at Belle Isle led to a battalion of the 4th Swiss being transferred back to Rennes, after a Swiss officer had offered to help the British in exchange for settlement of his gambling debts.

Tales of the hardships of the war in Spain were making service unpopular just as many men were coming to the end of their initial enlistments. Although the official policy, proclaimed by Napoleon on 1 November 1810, was to honour the expiry of terms of service, the pressure to re-enlist was too much for some. In 1811 Voltigeur Bussy, having absconded from the British service that he had entered after being captured, was back at the Lille depot. He wrote that 'the quartermaster asks me if I want to re-enlist. I answer him that I've had enough of service, that I want my leave.' The response was robust: Bussy was sent to the citadel, and 'after 10 days of arrest, seeing that I will never gain my freedom, I make up my mind to sign a new engagement for 2 years.'

In 1811 Napoleon realized that the Swiss contingent was becoming too disparate, and ordered a reorganization of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Regts in France into two battalions per regiment. The regimental depots were transferred to Strasbourg, Lauterbourg and Nancy; the battalions of the 2nd were to be based at Avignon and Toulon, the 3rd at Bergen op Zoom, and the 4th at Rennes. Each battalion was to comprise six 140-man companies – four of fusiliers and one each of grenadiers and voltigeurs. The regimental artillery companies were equipped with two 3-pdr light cannon. In December 1811, Napoleon inspected the 2nd and 4th Swiss in Paris.

In March 1812 a new capitulation by Switzerland, which renewed the mutual defence agreement for another 25 years, was signed despite resentment among many Swiss, who blamed France for ruining their economy and for famine in the eastern cantons. The Swiss benefited from an overall reduction in troop quotas to 12,000, albeit with a provision for 2,000 replacements per year. This led to a further reorganization: each regiment would now provide three active-service battalions, an artillery company, and a depot battalion. A grenadier battalion to serve in the Imperial Guard was also agreed, but was never recruited. For the invasion of Russia in 1812 all four Swiss Regiments served together in Gen Merle's division of Marshal Oudinot's II Corps.

A colonel of the 4th Swiss, after Neumann from Dresden, dated 1810–13. This shows sky-blue lapels, cuffs and collar. Pre-1812 regulation piping for the 4th Swiss was supposed to be black, but this illustration shows white piping – which is consistent with a grenadier officer's jacket of the 4th Swiss held in the collections of the Lucerne Museum, as well as several other period illustrations. The original caption suggests that this is Col Perrier; however, in March 1810 Perrier was replaced by Charles d'Affry from the 3rd Swiss. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

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A magnificent example of a regulation long-tailed uniform coat worn by a grenadier officer of the Valais Battalion, with distinctive white facings piped red, and gold buttons. (Musée d'Histoire, Sion)

Invasion

After crossing the border in late June, II Corps – together with Gen St Cyr's VI (Bavarian) Corps, and Gen Doumerc's division of cuirassiers from III Reserve Cavalry Corps, all under the command of Oudinot – guarded the left flank of the Grande Armée as it followed the elusive enemy deep into Russia. Extremes of weather, shortage of food, bad water, and the sheer distances to be marched over terrible roads all combined to degrade the fighting strength of the Swiss. Captain Rosselet described 'by day, great heat; terrible storms with thunder and hail; by night, floods and cold in our wet clothes. It's terrible to bivouac in these conditions. Many have dysentery'. Captain Bégos of the 2nd Swiss complained of the impossible roads; after the rains came, 8 or 10 oxen were needed to move each cannon, and took two days to drag them 3 leagues. Lieutenant-Colonel Thomasset of the 3rd Regt wrote to Col May complaining of the great distances the men had to cover, 'which drove our agony to the limit, and meant that two-thirds of the men fell out and are now with the stragglers'. Despite having '2,000 pairs of shoes in store', with each man having '3 pairs – 2 in their packs and one on their feet,' Thomasset was pessimistic – 'I don't know what is to become of us... We have not had any bread for two months; only a little flour, of which each soldier carries 4lb in a small sack. The entire country is devastated, the houses are looted, the peasants have fled'. In his regiment, 'two-thirds stayed in the rear and amused themselves by marauding; however, every day some rejoin.' He claimed that even the war in Spain had been '*une plaisanterie*' compared to this, and bemoaned the fact that 'I haven't drunk any wine for two months'.

First Polotsk, 16–18 August

In mid-August, a Russian army under Gen Count Wittgenstein moved to attack the major French arsenal at Polotsk on the Dvina river. Captain Bégos of the 2nd Swiss described the town as 'dominated by a wood' below which it was 'set out as an amphitheatre.' On 16 August the Russians advanced out of that woodland to attack Oudinot's Franco-Bavarian force. When the marshal was wounded Gen St Cyr took over command, withdrawing the baggage and wounded over the river the following day. This was only a feint, however: on the 18th he constructed a new bridge further upstream, re-crossed the Dvina, and attacked Wittgenstein's left wing with troops that he infiltrated down a ravine. Initially held in reserve, on the final day the Swiss formed squares in front of the town, and

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succeeded in driving off a massed Russian cavalry charge that had already overrun a French brigade; St Cyr, his carriage overturned, only escaped by taking refuge in one of the Swiss squares. Voltigeur Bussy described how his battalion then supported a cuirassier charge which retook a lost French artillery battery. Wittgenstein withdrew, and after the battle St Cyr praised the Swiss for their performance: 'The French are more impetuous in an advance, but if it comes to a retreat, we can count on the calm and courage of the Swiss. That is why I kept them in reserve today.'

Painting by Escher of fusiliers of the Valais Battalion in Spain in 1809, probably depicting the first siege of Gerona. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

The battle had no decisive result, and thereafter the Swiss contingent bedded down at Polotsk as an anchor for the left flank of the Grande Armée, which Napoleon continued to lead towards Moscow in pursuit of the Russian armies. Rosselet says that their camp was 'a real town, made up of fine, strong huts, constructed so as to be warm, because we expected to overwinter there'. Nevertheless, dysentery and typhus were rife, and foraging parties were vulnerable to ambushes. By mid-September only 2,825 Swiss were under arms, so the arrival on 12 October of 1,000 reinforcements from Switzerland was welcome.

However, after the massive confrontation between the main armies at Borodino early in September, Gen Wittgenstein had also been reinforced, and could now muster some 40,000 men against the 27,000 of the French II and VI Corps. An additional 12,000 Russian troops from Finland under Gen Stengel were also moving south; these crossed the Dvina, and manoeuvred to cut off the forces at Polotsk. This envelopment, coupled with the threat of Wittgenstein's superior numbers, appeared to make the town untenable; but St Cyr, having received his marshal's baton after First Polotsk, decided to defend his ground when Wittgenstein attacked before Stengel's enveloping force was in place.

Second Polotsk, 18–20 October

The Swiss excelled at fighting in defensive positions, and at Second Polotsk they held numerous redoubts for guns and trenches for infantry. Late on the evening of 17 October the elite companies of the 1st Swiss were holding a fortified church at Rostna in front of the main line when they were surrounded by two Russian regiments that appeared from the woods through the mist. When their ammunition was exhausted the men fixed bayonets and successfully broke out, though leaving 150 dead behind. The regiment also displayed audacity in the attack when, late on the afternoon of the second day of the battle, the main Russian assault engaged the 1st and 2nd Swiss, who were still deployed slightly forward of the rest of the army. Rather than withdrawing, these units counter-charged; Capt Muller from the 2nd Regt seized the regimental Eagle and charged forward,

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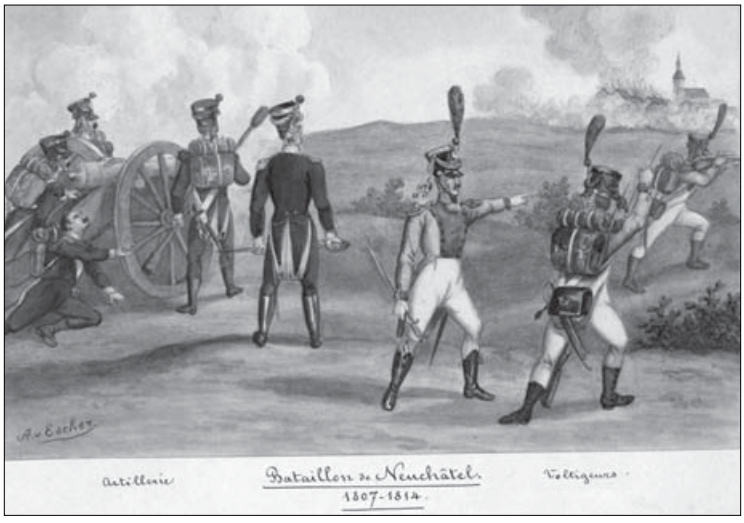

In this study by Escher, men of the Neuchâtel Battalion's artillery company are shown on the left, wearing blue coats with yellow facings and turnbacks. (There is a dearth of reliable information about the dress of the artillery companies of the numbered Swiss regiments, but they probably followed French style in wearing all-blue uniforms piped in red.) On the right are men from the Neuchâtel Battalion's voltigeur company, wearing yellow coats faced with red, and shakos with green plumes and cords. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

prompting the rest to follow, but he was quickly shot down. In the same regiment Capt Salis was also killed, and Col Castella and Capt Bégos both had horses shot from under them. Twelve officers from the 1st Swiss died in this action, including *Chef de battalion* Dulliker, commanding the 1st Battalion.

Soon two whole Russian divisions had debouched from the forest and were deploying against the two Swiss regiments, who began to retire in stages; the Eagles of both regiments became exposed, but were saved from capture. General Wittgenstein threw in his cavalry, including the elite Chevalier Guard, but a Swiss volley at 70 paces repulsed them. Meanwhile the 3rd and 4th Swiss, which occupied the ramparts of Polotsk town, left their entrenchments to counter-attack and, covered by canister fire from the redoubts, helped their countrymen complete their withdrawal. Another Swiss attack by all four regiments persuaded the Russians to seek the protection of the woods once again. (The old Valais Battalion, now part of the French 11th Light in Verdier's division, had also been in action, successfully defending the 'Des Tuileries' redoubt throughout the day.)

The superior Russian numbers would inevitably tell; however, on the third day co-ordination between their main body and its outflanking force broke down. As thick fog descended, Gen Wittgenstein waited in vain for Stengel's advance on the south bank of the Dvina to develop, and that evening St Cyr sought to make good his escape, with the 3rd and 4th Swiss in the rearguard. At 9pm buildings set alight by artillery fire started to illuminate the withdrawal, and the Russians immediately launched an assault to seize the bridges over the Dvina before the French could cross. They reached a pontoon over the Pelota tributary, but were pushed back by the 4th Swiss, who had formed up in the town's Jesuits Square. Colonel d'Affry, now their commanding officer, wrote that 'the presence of so many Russian columns in the town did not intimidate my brave Swiss for a single moment', and the 4th made the Russians fight for every house. The regiment's Capt Schumacher described fighting 'through the streets lighted by burning buildings. The houses on fire collapsed around us as we fought against the advancing enemy.' After the withdrawal was complete the Swiss broke free, and all the bridges were blown; Capt Bleuler, his horse shot from under him, had to swim the river.

The Russians' bungled manoeuvre cost them dearly, but the French and Bavarian corps paid for their stubbornness with 9,000 casualties. These included no fewer than 1,100 from the 1st and 2nd Swiss combined, and about 400 each from the 3rd and 4th Regts; no more than 2,000 Swiss now remained in the ranks. In total, Col Castella of the 2nd Regt recorded 33 of his 50 officers either killed or wounded, and the Swiss received 34 awards of the Legion of Honour. Colonels Castella and Amey were both promoted to brigade general.

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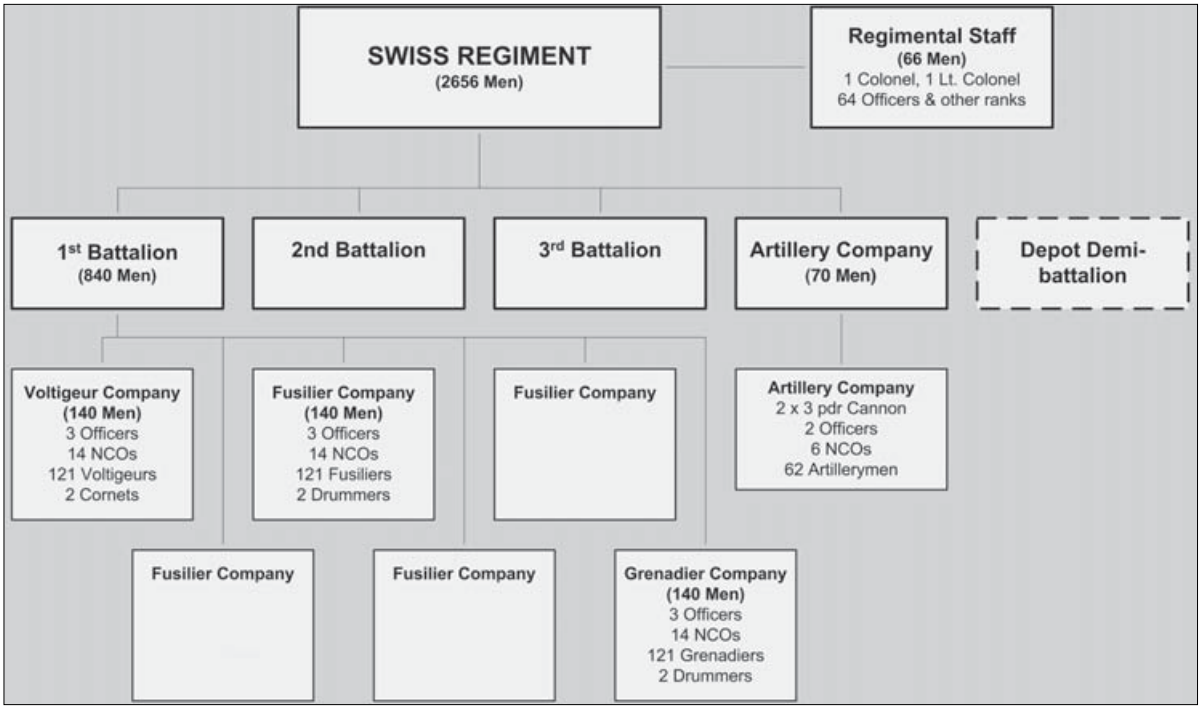

Organization of a Swiss regiment, 1812. Following a first reorganization during 1811, on 28 March 1812 regiments were confirmed as having three active-service battalions, each organized in six companies, and a depot demi-battalion of four companies. However, they were nowhere near full establishment strength at the start of the Russian campaign. Dempsey states that the 1st Swiss had 2,103 men (Pigeard gives 1,371 in two battalions – a third battalion was raised in 1812, and probably joined the regiment at the start of the campaign); the 2nd Regiment had 1,822 (Pigeard, 1,787 in three battalions); the 3rd, 1,743 (Pigeard, 1,333 in three battalions); and the 4th Swiss, 1,597 (Pigeard, 1,572 in two battalions).

Napoleon's retreat from Moscow had begun on 19 October. On the 28th, St Cyr met up with Victor's IX Corps near Smolensk; their commands would now form Napoleon's last strategic reserve. Marching through 'snow over your knees', Voltigeur Bussy was cheered when on 26 October 'each of us receives 2 pairs of shoes and 2 pairs of gaiters.' He was going to need them.

The Beresina, 23–28 November

While Gens Kutuzov and Wittgenstein pursued what remained of the Grande Armée as they retreated westwards from Moscow, Adm Tchichagov's Army of Moldova, which had been fighting the Turks, had been marching up from the Ukraine, and now threatened to cut from the south the French line of retreat. Tchichagov was stalled at Borisov on the Beresina river when his advance guard was ambushed by units of Oudinot's II Corps; during this action the bridge in the town, upon which Napoleon had depended for the Grande Armée's crossing to the west bank, was accidentally destroyed.

When the vanguard of the Grande Armée arrived at the river on 23 November, Gen Éblé's engineers were forced to begin building two improvised trestle bridges at the Studienka ford north of Borisov; in the meantime, Oudinot deceived Tchichagov into believing that he was preparing for a crossing further south. On 26 November, the Swiss marched across the bridges and prepared to defend the west-bank bridgehead, as Tchichagov's troops moved north to attack it. Guarding the crossings on the west bank were some 5,600 infantry (II Corps, plus the few hundred survivors of Marshal Ney's III Corps), supported by some 1,400 cavalry, and just 2 guns – though they were covered by batteries on the heights on the east bank. The Swiss, numbering perhaps no more than 1,000 all ranks, bivouacked in woods near the village of Brili; they were

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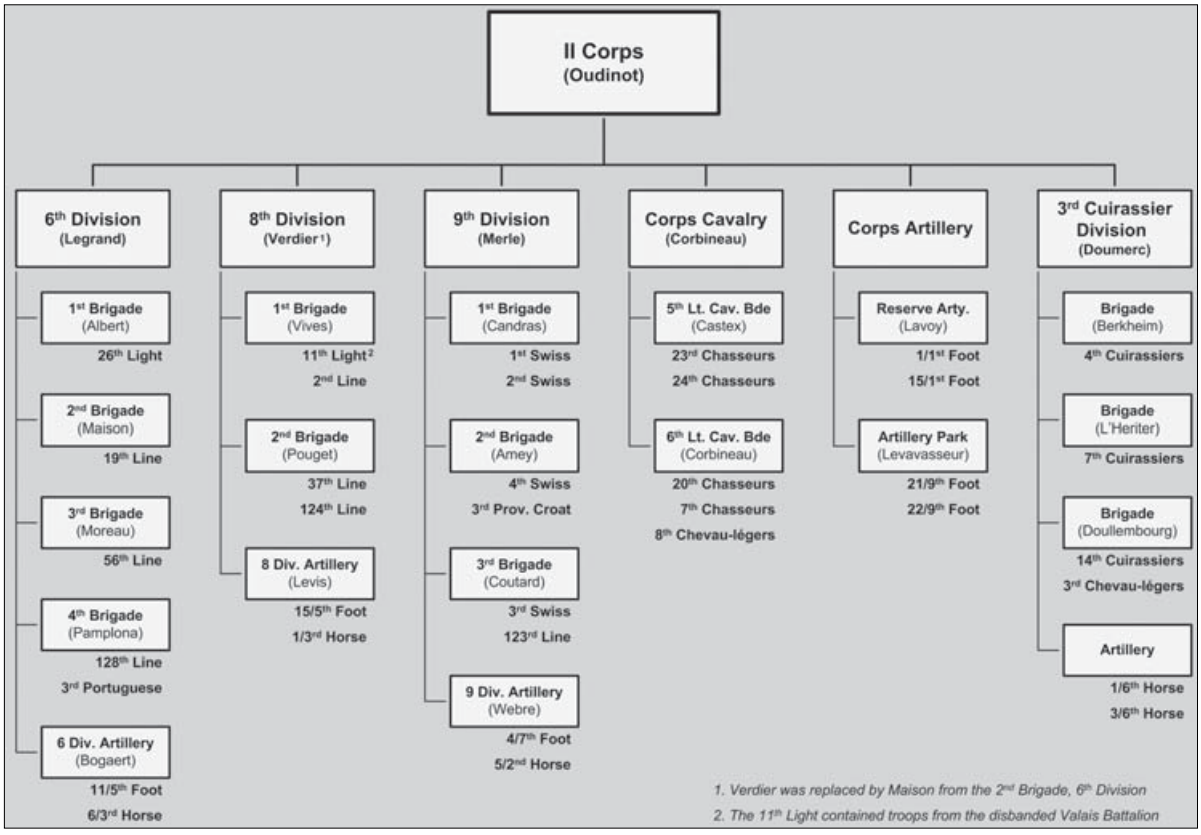

Diagram of the 1812 order of battle of Marshal Oudinot's II Corps. The Russian campaign was the first occasion on which all four Swiss regiments served together in the same formation – Gen Merle's division in II Corps.

grateful for having acquired greatcoats in Polotsk, as the temperature was now -180°C (10°F). Captain Bégos of the 2nd Swiss described their camp:

> The forest consisted of full-grown trees, rather dense, both the ground and the pines being thick with snow. At nightfall, each soldier took his pack as a pillow and the snow for a mattress, with his musket in his hand. To keep each other warm our men huddled closely together. The biggest pines weren't shedding their snow, and under this kind of umbrella we suffered less.

A first indecisive clash with Gen Tchaplitz's advance guard of Tchichagov's army took place on 26 November; Tchichagov then halted while he sent word to Gen Kutuzov, leading the pursuit of the Grande Armée from the east, but his message was long delayed. This allowed time for the French bridgehead to be reinforced by the Imperial Guard, and Gen Zajonczek's remnant of the Polish V Corps.

Early on 28 November, Bégos 'heard a formidable noise of gunfire and hurrahs. It was the Russian army which, knowing our army corps had crossed the river, was coming on in even greater numbers to dispute the passage with us'. At 6am the Russians advanced along the Brili road through forest; it was still dark and 'a little snow was falling'. At 8am, Oudinot counter-attacked with the Swiss in the lead, but ran into heavy fire. 'General Amey was hit … General Canderas and his adjutant had fallen too', wrote Lt Legler of the 1st Swiss; *Chef de bataillon* Blatmann was

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also 'shot in the head.' Ammunition started to run out, and Legler described 300 men standing idly behind their officers for lack of cartridges. He asked Gen Merle to order a bayonet charge, and Bussy described how it was repelled by the Russians: 'Suddenly we are pushed back, we retreat 50 paces' – but then another charge was ordered: 'The chiefs shout: "Forward!". The charge succeeds everywhere. We are thrown on the enemy, get the upper hand, crossing bayonets at point-blank range. Slowly the Russians retire, still firing'. This success was not without cost, including *Chef de bataillon* Vonderweid mortally wounded.

Thick powder-smoke mingled with falling snow to reduce visibility to 30 yards. The Swiss, facing eight Russian regiments, were vastly outnumbered, and another eight regiments from the Russian 18th Division were moving forward. The 1st Swiss spread out in *en tirailleurs* to avoid the worst of the fire, and Oudinot ordered them to take cover in the forest. Moments before being shot from his horse the marshal ordered Doumerc's cuirassiers to charge through the sparse pines to stabilize the situation. Ney then took over command; he rallied II Corps, and also ordered up the Poles.

The Russian 18th Division were taken unawares as they moved forwards through the woods in open order; some 1,500–2,000 were killed or wounded by this sudden onslaught, and many hundreds more were taken prisoner. The French émigré Rochechouart, who was fighting with the Russians, wrote of his surprise: 'No sooner had we got into [the] forest than we were vigorously charged by a regiment of cuirassiers, such as we certainly didn't expect to meet with on that kind of battlefield'. Bussy described the intensity of the fighting that followed:

> We cannot fire with so many troops intermingling. So the bayonet and the musket-butt are used to parry and deliver blows… our ranks have been depleted while the enemy is receiving reinforcements [the 9th Russian division was moving forward to take the place of the 18th] … it is worse than butchery. There is blood everywhere on the snow.

The Swiss voltigeur saw a Russian taking aim at him and firing, but did not hear the ball. He leant against a little pine tree: 'Fire! I see a man fall … our ranks close up, our line shortens and courage redoubles … our cartridge pouches are refilled.' The cuirassiers re-formed behind the infantry, and further fighting in the woods continued until darkness fell. By nightfall each side had lost about 5,000 men, but the western ends of the Beresina bridges remained secure. The Swiss had played their full part: 24 officers had been killed, and only 300 all ranks remained standing (including 2 officers and 12 men from the 2nd Swiss, 60 from 3rd Swiss, and 67 from 4th Swiss), and 100 of these survivors were wounded. Private Bussy was one of only 7 voltigeurs remaining in his company.

* * *

The retreat continued along a causeway over the marshes at Zemblin. Captain Bégos had his right hand and left foot frozen, but survived, albeit with five toes missing (in 1816 he would receive a pension of 1,200 francs and was retrospectively admitted to the Legion of Honour). Voltigeur Bussy wrote that the men were eating horsemeat, and flour mixed with water. He had three packets of cartridges left, but his fingers were so cold

This 1810-type shako was worn by a Swiss voltigeur at the second battle of Polotsk in October 1812; the label shows where it was clipped by a Russian musket ball. It has the generic voltigeur's diamond plate and bugle-horn emblem, though lacking a regimental number. Note that the cockade and lace band are later additions; this shako was modified after the Napoleonic Wars to be worn by local mounted police. (Musée Militaire Vaudois, Morges)

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The battle on the west bank to protect the Beresina bridges, 28 November 1812. Lieutenant Legler of the 1st Swiss would write that as Gen Doumerc's cavalry charge started, his own regiment 'ran forward with a single shout: "The cuirassiers are attacking!"' Captain Rey from the voltigeurs of the 1st Swiss took up a drum to beat the charge, since there were no drummers still standing. While the Swiss helped to secure the west bank, German units of IX Corps were prominent in the defence of the east bank – about three-quarters of the troops who fought to hold the crossings were non-French. The three days' fighting at the Beresina cost probably 20,000 killed, wounded and captured before the survivors of the Grande Armée – perhaps 40,000 men, of whom many were effectively non-combatants – were able to resume their retreat towards Wilna. Nevertheless, the outcome was definitely a failure on the part of the Russian commanders. (Jauslin, G. Joyet collection)

that he could not load his musket. He was wearing a Russian woman's overcoat, his head and shako were enveloped by a big kerchief of black wool, and the big toe of his right foot was frost-bitten. He came across Sgt Golaz, who sold him (!) a pair of shoes, but he 'had to unstitch the back… the shoes being too short.' Bussy articulated the despair of many: 'I don't feel like going any further. I can't walk any more. I prefer to be captured with a lot of people than alone on the road.' Colonel May received a letter from one of his officers telling him that many men were so 'overcome with fatigue and the biting cold that they could not carry on, and successively they fell into the hands of the enemy.' On 14 December, in temperatures of -27°C (-17°F), the survivors of the four Swiss regiments re-crossed the frozen River Niemen, and headed for a temporary depot at Kustrin. In January 1813 the Swiss had enough men to form just four provisional companies.

THE SWISS IN 1813–15

Some 800 men eventually re-assembled at their depots: the 1st Swiss at Metz, the 2nd at Lauterbourg, the 3rd at Landau, and the 4th at Nancy. The Swiss historian Vallière described them arriving in small groups, with swollen eyes, gaunt faces and long beards. These cadres, combined with men who had remained in the depots, new recruits, the recovered sick returning from hospital, and veterans from the Peninsula, allowed each regiment to raise one battalion. Bussy – typically showing concern for his attire – wrote that only after reaching Munster did he find a shirt, a pair of shoes and a large flannel sash.

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By mid-May 1813 the battalions totalled 1,515 men, and were combined into a Swiss brigade under Col Abyberg; this officer had served in the Helvetian Legion, becoming a *chef de bataillon* in the 3rd Demi-Brigade in 1801, and major commanding the 1st Swiss depot at Plaisance in 1812. From their base in Amsterdam the brigade, serving under the promoted *Général de division* Amey, were assigned to defend the Dutch coast and suppress Dutch dissidence. (When Abyberg heard rumours that all foreign units were to be disbanded, Gen Merle, now governor of Maastricht, wrote to him that each man should be given two muskets to take with him.)

Escher painting of soldiers of the 1st Swiss in battle; at Bremen on 13 October 1813, Dufresne's single-battalion 1st Swiss Regt were assaulted by between 4,000 and 5,000 Cossacks. The voltigeur company were cut off in the eastern suburbs, losing 86 out of 97 men; however, a capitulation permitted the regiment to leave the town with the honours of war. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

Recruits were absorbed over the summer, and by September 1813 the total strength was 2,391 men. The 4th Swiss, commanded in the field by Bleuler, joined the garrison of Groningen on the Dutch coast, while the other regiments advanced to Minden in Westphalia to engage the advancing Russian and Prussian armies. By the end of the year all the single-battalion regiments were besieged in various towns: the 1st Swiss in Maastricht, both the 2nd and 3rd in Wesel, and the 4th in Delfzijl and Coeverden. All these garrisons held out until Napoleon's first abdication in April 1814.

Soon after his restoration, King Louis XVIII signed a new contract with the Confederation. He brought Swiss soldiers back to the Tuileries Palace in Paris, and pardoned their previous service to Napoleon. When Napoleon escaped from exile on Elba in 1815, the Swiss Diet called all Swiss soldiers home, arguing that their contract was now null and void. Colonel d'Affry, with the 2nd and 4th Swiss, was on the road for home when the column met Napoleon on his way to Paris; the Swiss marched past their former French comrades in silence, not returning their shouts of '*Vive l'Empereur!*'. D'Affry told Napoleon that his soldiers had taken an oath to the French monarch, and as Napoleon had given up the French crown the Swiss were not his to command anymore. The 1st and 3rd Regts also marched back to Switzerland.

Fusiliers of the 1st Swiss Regiment, by Vernet. Bardin, the man responsible for the new dress regulations of 1812, charged Vernet with the responsibility of representing 'an officer and soldier from each branch of the regular army' in a series of 244 colour plates. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

Nevertheless, some Swiss still wanted to fight, and Napoleon was able to recruit them into a '2nd Foreign Swiss Regiment'; with two battalions, this was composed of 599 men under the command of the Swiss brothers Stoffel. One battalion, with 21 officers and 386 men, was part of III Corps in Marshal Grouchy's right wing during the Waterloo campaign, and suffered heavily in battle against the Prussians at Wavre while trying to storm the bridge over the Dyle canal. The other battalion was formed in Paris, but, short of equipment, it never took the field.

Uniforms – see Commentary to Plate H

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Vernet's plates are, perhaps surprisingly, not always accurate – for example, in this study of officers of the 1st Swiss the cuff flaps are solid yellow, though they should be red with red piping. Other examples of this plate show the cuff flaps as red, but with still-incorrect yellow piping. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

Vernet's study of grenadiers of the 2nd Swiss. Note the bottom edge of the false turnbacks, which by this stage were cut flush with the jacket's tail. The red grenade motif is accurate; the voltigeurs displayed a chamois bugle-horn, and the fusiliers a crowned 'N' in the regimental colour. However, the grenadiers' epaulettes – shown here in silver – ought to be red, as should the bands and chevrons on the shakos. (Bibliothek am Guisanplatz)

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PLATE COMMENTARIES

A: HELVETIAN LEGION & DEMI-BRIGADES, 1799

A1: *Chef de bataillon* of a Swiss demi-brigade

In 1798 Swiss uniforms initially followed the French pattern; however, the traditional red colour of the coats worn by Swiss regiments in French service was replaced with Republican blue. All six Swiss demi-brigades wore a plain blue coat with red facings, a blue waistcoat and trousers, and a bicorne hat adorned with a cockade in the then-Swiss colours of yellow, red and green. By 1800 the coat – as A1 – had yellow lapels and cuffs, both piped in red, with yellow piping on the green cuff-flaps, the red collars, the red turnbacks, the shoulder-straps, and the pockets; grenadiers had red-piped shoulder-straps or red epaulettes. (The Swiss regiments in the service of Piedmont-Sardinia had blue coats after the French fashion, with a variety of facing colours. How quickly – or even if – these uniforms were changed when they were reorganized into the 'Belmont' and 'Ernst' legions is not known.)

This officer wears a *habit* that conforms to the regulations apart from the red cuff flaps. Following French practice, his rank is indicated by gold epaulette straps with a thick bullion-twist fringe on the left strap only; colonels wore two buillion-fringed epaulettes, majors (a rank only created in 1803) the same but with silver straps. Captains displayed a thinner gold lace fringe on the left only; the *capitaine adjutant-major* or battalion second-in-command, lace fringe on the right; lieutenants, as captain but with a red stripe along the straps, and *sous-lieutenants*, the same with two red stripes. The figure wears white summer small-clothes.

A2: *Chasseur à pied*, Helvetian Legion

In the Helvetian Legion, line infantry wore a blue uniform very similar to that of the demi-brigades. The light infantry wore green coats with lapels and turnbacks of the same colour, all piped in red, with red collars and cuffs, yellow waistcoats, green breeches, black gaiters, bicornes with a green plume or 'carrot' pompon, and white crossbelts. This light infantryman is shown wearing the regulation green uniform, but with a buttoned flapless cuff rather than the more common pointed cuff. The chasseurs were raised, in four companies each of 100 men, at the same time as the rest of the Legion in 1798. They were reorganized into a light battalion in September 1799, and eventually joined the 2nd Swiss Demi-Brigade of the French Army when the Helvetian Legion was merged with the demi-brigades in 1803.

A3: Officer, Hussars, Helvetian Legion

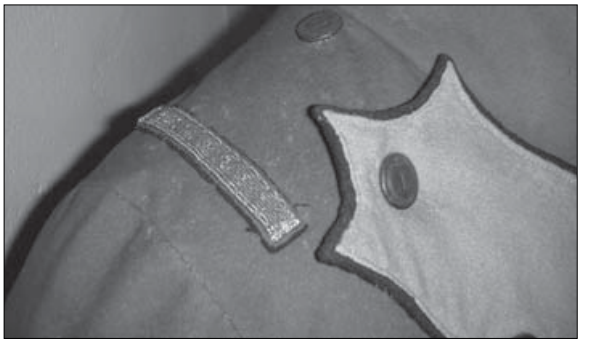
The hussars wore a dark green dolman with yellow braid and Austrian knots, and red collars and pointed cuffs both piped yellow; under the dolman they wore a braided yellow waistcoat with a red collar, a 'barrel' sash of red (and/or green) and yellow, and dark green breeches decorated with a yellow stripe and Austrian knots. Black mirliton caps (decorated with either a red *flamme* edged in yellow, or cords in green, red or yellow), and a plume in Swiss colours, completed the uniform. Their re-designation as *chasseurs à cheval* in 1800 – in part, to make them less expensive – does not seem to have had any major effect on their dress, but the waistcoat changed from yellow to red. This officer's uniform differs from that of the rank-and-file mostly in its quality, and in his somewhat more elaborate lace being of gold bullion thread rather than yellow worsted.

LEFT

The bicorne preserved with the uniform of Capt Visinaud of the 1st Swiss – see page 14. The black felt hat is decorated only with a white disc-style pompon inset with the regimental number, and a somewhat faded tricolour cockade secured with a heavy 'loop'. (Musée Montreux)

BELOW

Details from the Visinaud uniform coat, showing the yellow lapels piped with blue; the silver buttons bear the number '1' – the only change this coat would have needed when the old 3rd Demi-Brigade became part of the new 1st Regiment. Note too the epaulette retaining strap (*bride*), in silver lace worked on a red cloth backing that is piped blue. The epaulette would be slipped under the strap and secured by the button below the collar. (Musée Montreux)



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A good view of a 'Brandenburg'-style cuff, from the Visinaud coat. This follows the regulation colours for the 1st Swiss, with the cuff in yellow, the cuff flap red, and the piping for both in blue. (Musée Montreux)

B: 1st SWISS DEMI-BRIGADE; ROCHEFORT, 1804

B1: *Chef de bataillon*

The reorganizations of 1803 saw the Helvetian Legion merged with the demi-brigades and, with the passing of the worst of French Revolutionary fanaticism, the return of the traditional red coat of the Swiss. The figure shown has the 1st Demi-Brigade's white facings with blue piping, and silver 'metal'; the 2nd wore blue lapels and cuffs piped with white, and the 3rd had yellow facings piped with blue. All three demi-brigades wore red collars, piped in their respective facing colours (see Table 2, page 8).

B2: Sergeant-major

This figure – after Rigo's illustration of a sergeant-major from the 3rd Demi-Brigade – wears the standard dress uniform of the period; he carries an *An IX sabre-briquet* hanging from a *baudrier* crossbelt. His epaulettes, bicorne loop, and the diagonal double stripes on his forearms are all in silver (the latter backed with blue), as befits his rank. Corporals had two stripes of white lace, and sergeants one stripe of silver lace.

B3: Fusilier

This parade-dress order of the centre-company soldier's uniform is unremarkable apart from the fact that he sports an *An IX sabre-briquet* on a second crossbelt. It was not uncommon for fusiliers to carry sidearms during the Revolutionary wars and the early Empire period; thereafter the *sabre-briquet* seems to have more or less returned to being the distinction of the two flank (elite) companies of each unit – the grenadiers and the light-infantry voltigeurs.

C: 1st SWISS REGIMENT; CALABRIA, 1809

Between their raising in 1805–07 and their rebuilding early in 1813 following the Russian campaign, all four Swiss regiments wore uniforms of standard French design but in their distinctive *rouge garance* (madder red). Up to and during the Russian campaign the Swiss had the pre-1812 habit with long skirts, with regimental facings as listed in Table 3 (page 12). Turnbacks, waistcoats, breeches and crossbelts were all white. Voltigeurs had a yellow collar with regimental piping, yellow epaulettes, and a bugle-horn badge of the same colour on their turnbacks; grenadiers had white epaulettes with red crescents, and a red flaming grenade badge on their turnbacks. (However, it should be noted that in both cases variations were certainly seen between the regiments, and probably within individual companies as well.)

Headdress was the French shako adorned with a brass 'crowned eagle' plate, a tricolour cockade with company pompon above, and white cords. Voltigeurs had the same shako with a diamond-shaped plate bearing the light infantry bugle-horn motif, a green-tipped yellow plume, and green cords. Grenadiers were distinguished by a black bearskin with a brass plate, a red plume, white cords, and brass chinscales. Some of the inevitable variations included differing shako plates (the 'diamond' style was apparently not uncommon); fixed or detachable visors; grenadier plumes in white-tipped red or red-tipped white; voltigeurs with yellow or white cords; the presence or absence of shako bands and chevrons (red for grenadiers, yellow for voltigeurs); and the practice of the 3rd Swiss wearing their pompons off-set to the left front of their shakos rather than centred (see Plate G3).

Sappers had gold-fringed epaulettes, a yellow eagle on their turnbacks, and pairs of crossed axes on each sleeve. Drummers had blue jackets with regimental facings, all trimmed with gold lace and piped according to regimental colour. Officers' uniforms were natually more varied, though they generally followed French styles (see MAA 141, *Napoleon's Line Infantry*), with regimental distinctions and particularities.

C1: Officer of a grenadier company

The 1st Swiss Regiment 'inherited' the uniform of the 3rd Demi-Brigade more or less intact after the former absorbed the remnants of all the demi-brigades in 1805. This officer of the grenadier company of one of the regiment's battalions wears a long-tailed coatee cut in the older demi-brigade style. The facings are a red collar and yellow lapels and cuffs, all piped with blue. The imposing bearskin bears a flaming grenade motif on the plate, with cords and tassels woven of metallic gold thread over silk. Swiss grenadier officers were only appointed after their names had been submitted (initially by Marshal Lannes) for the emperor's personal approval, which would have been fairly well informed. Many wealthy Swiss families had, for generations past, sent sons to serve as officers in the French service, and since the Revolution the French governments had also been actively gathering intelligence about influential members of society in the Swiss cantons.

C2: Grenadier

The uniform of this grenadier – after a Bader illustration, and Forthoffer's rendering of a jacket known to have existed in Dresden prior to World War II – follows the same pattern, the only difference being a yellow collar rather than a red one. The regulation piping for the 1st Swiss was blue, but some sources – the Bader grenadier, and a fusilier from the Weiland MS – show white piping. (Whether these are 'wild cards', accurate renderings of common variations at the time, or artistic errors of omission, is unknown – as is so

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often the case.) Other examples of variations include cuff flaps in yellow rather than red; cuff flaps piped with yellow rather than blue; and epaulettes with yellow crescents instead of red. The plate on the grenadier's cap bears an Imperial eagle motif rather than a flaming grenade, though both styles were probably in common use prior to 1812.

C3: Grenadier drummer

This figure – after secondary source illustrations by Boisselier and Leroux – shows a grenadier drummer in rather archetypal form; the variations to such a soldier's dress while on campaign would no doubt be as wide as those of his fellow infantrymen. While on the march the drum, shown here as ready for playing, would be slung (rather awkwardly, one must assume) on the drummer's back on top of his knapsack.

D: VALAIS BATTALION; SPAIN, 1809–10

D1: Grenadier corporal

The Valais Battalion followed the French pattern of dress, but wearing a red jacket with white collar, lapels, cuffs and cuff flaps, all piped in red. Buttons and eagle shako plates were of yellow metal. There is no evidence that a voltigeur company actually existed – original documentation refers to fusiliers and grenadiers only. According to Dempsey, the addition of voltigeurs seems to have been an assumption on the part of the artist of the Wurtz Collection that was subsequently echoed by succeeding secondary sources.

Although images of Valais grenadiers sometimes show them displaying grenade motifs on their collars, or wearing bearskins, there is no primary evidence to support the idea that they ever did either. Their prescribed distinctions were plain white epaulettes, and shakos with red bands, chevrons and plumes or pompons. This figure wears the diagonal double stripe of orange-pink (*aurore*) lace on the forearms denoting his corporal's rank. Note also the dark blue greatcoat rolled and strapped to his knapsack; this coat was distinctive of Valais soldiers.

D2: Captain, grenadier company

The jacket worn by this captain of grenadiers is drawn from an original now in the collections of the Musée d'Histoire at Sion, Switzerland. As with the rank-and-file, there is no evidence to support the idea of grenadier officers wearing bearskins.

D3: *Chef de Bataillon* Pierre-Joseph Blanc

Blanc, fornerly the *capitaine adjutant-major* of the Valais Battalion, was effectively in command of the unit after De Bons was wounded in 1808; he was an active and able officer, and was often in the thick of the fighting – as at Bascara on 11 April 1809, where he was shot through the collarbone but continued to rally his men, eventually winning the day. (Captain Blanc was no stranger to injury, having been shot in the left leg in 1795, and in the head in 1798; after the collarbone wound in 1809, he was shot above the hip in 1812, and finally in the left thigh in 1814. Nevertheless he lived until 1850, a few months short of his 80th birthday.) Blanc was formally promoted to *chef de bataillon* in 1810, and the image of him here – after a contemporary portrait – shows him as he would have appeared at around that date. Of particular note are the fittings of his shako, including the senior officer's impressive white plume and its socket, and especially the detachable peak, which seems to be attached by a pair of large gilt bosses above a gold band.

The turnbacks of Capt Visinaud's coat are of the old style; they show a triangle of the red coat below, and are not sewn down to the tail, but temporarily hooked up. They are decorated with an Imperial eagle motif in silver thread worked on red backing – one of a number of varying designs displayed by both officers and enlisted men. (Musée Montreux)

E: 2nd SWISS REGIMENT; PORTUGAL, 1807–09

E1: Fusilier

This figure wears trousers; he carries a slung haversack and water flask, and has a bundle of firewood attached to his knapsack – all features that were common enough on the march. The jacket has false cuffs, i.e. with the buttons and piping creating the illusion of a cuff flap (see E3). The facing colour of the 2nd Swiss was royal blue piped with yellow, though there was undoubtedly some variation in hue; uniforms were sourced in batches, at different times, and often from different cities or even countries, depending on a unit's travels during its years of service.

E2: Lieutenant

This officer is modelled after Lt Louis Bégos, going to the rescue of a straggler who has been set upon by guerrillas, as described in his memoirs. Note the regimental number on the pompon of his oikskin-covered shako. A *surtout* coat without lapels would certainly have been the common 'everyday' wear for an officer on the march; the example shown here is a composite from a number of primary and secondary sources, as no original Swiss examples from the period seem to have survived. The evidence shows *surtouts* in a variety of styles, with both single and double rows of buttons, and design variations in the general cut, cuffs and turnbacks – all as is to be expected, of garments privately tailored for individuals. The figure carries a light infantry officer's sabre, as well as a double-barrelled musket or rifle (not a shotgun – Bégos brought down his man at 120 paces) – a good example of the sort of weapon that would find its way into a gentleman's campaigning kit. Bégos could certainly afford to provide himself with a fine personal weapon, since his father was the former foreign minister in the government of the Helvetian Republic.

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French *An XIII* cavalry pistol. This was carried not only by horsemen but also on occasion by some infantry officers (who had a wide range of personal sidearms, as one might expect), as well as by standard-bearers and sapper NCOs – see Plate F1. (Musée Militaire Vaudois, Morges)

E3: Voltigeur sergeant

This sergeant of a voltigeur company – after an illustration by Bader – is interesting for some idiosyncrasies of dress. Note the light infantry-style half-gaiters trimmed at the top with coloured tape; the shako cords in white rather than the usual yellow or green; the yellow cuffs piped blue, rather than the regulation blue cuffs piped yellow; and, perhaps most notably, the shako's detachable peak. Seemingly common throughout the Revolutionary and early Empire periods, tie-on detachable peaks appear to have been worn according to the soldier's personal taste – in this case, cocked over the sergeant's right eye.

F: NEUCHÂTEL BATTALION; POLAND, SUMMER 1812

In the Neuchâtel Battalion the coatee was the most striking feature, being bright yellow or chamois in colour; this earned them the nicknames 'canaries' from their fellow Swiss, '*sirens*' in France, and '*amarillos*', '*pasidos*' or '*canarios*' in Spain. Aside from the colour, it was also notable for having short tails (slightly longer for officers), with the bottom of the lapels cut either flush with the coat's front edge or 'squared off' an inch or two above the cutaway. Collar, lapels, cuffs, cuff flaps and turnbacks were all red, piped with yellow. Waistcoats and trousers were white, and gaiters were of the light infantry mid-calf style – either plain, or sometimes cut to resemble hussar boots with tape edging and tassels.

Fusiliers are shown with either white epaulettes, or yellow shoulder-straps piped in red. For formal occasions the grenadiers (carabiniers) wore bearskins without any plates, and possibly also lacking the usual red cords and plumes, and at other times shakos; they were also distinguished by red epaulettes, sword knots and gaiter-edging. The 'metal' (buttons, shako plates, chinscales, officer's epaulettes and lace, etc.) seems to have been white metal or silver. Neuchâtel's artillery company wore an entirely blue uniform with yellow collars and cuffs, all piped red, with red epaulettes and shako cords.

F1: Sapper sergeant

This stalwart soldier, preparing to march into Russia, is taken from Boisselier, following Wurtz. He carries a sapper's ornate *sabre-briquet*, as well as a brace of *An XIII* pistols in his belt. His sapper and rank insignia are worked in silver on red. His red collar, lapels and cuffs are piped yellow. Some mostly secondary sources omit the piping, possibly because the colour was the same as that of the jacket and therefore does not show up well; but several primary sources – e.g. De Bosset, and Le Brun's life portraits – show piping, and an original uniform now in Les Invalides, Paris, is clearly piped. Le Brun's portrait, as well as the Olmes plates – based on Neumann and the Petitpierre portrait – show the piping as yellow, not white.

F2: Voltigeur

For voltigeurs the epaulettes, sword-knots, gaiter-trim (when present), shako bands and plumes are shown as the usual green. This soldier wears the regulation uniform, with an older-style shako that, again, has a detachable peak. The colour of the short-tailed jacket is the famous 'canary'-yellow; there are sources that suggest it should be of an off-yellow buff hue, or even of a colour closer to a sort of 'crayfish-orange' – this from a German text of the 1813 campaign, published in 1817. However, several primary sources show a distinctive, reasonably bright golden-yellow. The confusion can certainly be explained in part by the variable nature of the dyes used at the time, as well as their fading at different rates and in slightly different ways (as discussed by Dempsey).

F3: Senior officer

This officer of field grade (i.e. major or above) is identified by his two thick-fringed bullion epaulettes, but the most striking aspect of the figure is his plumed hat. This '*chapeau à la Henri IV*' was worn as part of full-dress uniform, while a shako or bearskin was the order of the day on less formal occasions. The coatee – taken from a contemporary illustration – has the lapels cut flush with the bottom edge of the coat, though examples can also be found showing lapels 'squared off' a little higher – e.g. Cdt de Bosset's surviving coatee in Les Invalides, Paris. It is probable that both styles were worn.

G: 3rd SWISS REGIMENT; RUSSIA, SUMMER 1812

G1: Voltigeur

The lozenge shako-plate, rather than the more usual 'crowned eagle' device, bears a Swiss eagle motif rather than the traditional voltigeur bugle-horn; and the pompon is positioned (unusually for this regiment) at the front centre rather than off-centre to the left – a good example of the variety of styles, both regulation and non-regulation, that might co-exist in the same unit at the same time. Though the Bardin regulations had officially been in effect for some months, it is unlikely that the 3rd, or indeed any of the Swiss regiments, marched into Russia in the new uniforms.

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G2: Grenadier corporal
Although this grenadier NCO – after an illustration by Lang – sports a bearskin with the traditional 'crowned eagle' plate, such caps were by this time becoming increasingly scarce, and the shako was the more common headgear in these companies. In 1813, when the Bardin regulations were more generally applied as the French army scrambled to rebuild itself after the Russian disaster, no Swiss grenadiers wore the bearskin 'officially', despite being shown thus in well-known illustrations by Martinet and Lami.

G3: Fusilier
The wearing of cockades, pompons and the apex of the cords affixed off-centre to the left of the shako front was a habit peculiar to the 3rd Swiss – as shown in the Lang and Eggimann illustrations. The exact positioning (after Lang) appears to be just forward of the 'centre-left' of the rim. Though the specific inspiration for this stylistic flourish is obscure, it was not unique, being the fashion among certain units of both French light infantry and light cavalry in the Revolutionary and early Empire periods, as well as for some bodies of troops in the Netherlands.

H: 4th SWISS REGIMENT; HOLLAND, WINTER 1813–14

In early 1813, after the Swiss regiments had to be reformed following the disastrous losses of 1812, the soldiers wore uniforms that followed the Bardin regulations, which had been published on 19 January 1812 but were not enacted for most until 1813 (see MAA 141, *Napoleon's Line Infantry*). The main change was the adoption of the *habit-veste* – a short-tailed jacket with closed plastron-style lapels – to replace the *habit long*. The 1812 shako did away with cords, replaced the pompon with a disc of padded cloth bearing the number of the battalion, retained chinscales, used coloured bands and chevrons to distinguish elite companies, and bore a plate with a crowned eagle over a semi-circular base into which the regimental number was cut. The bearskin was phased out, so grenadiers mostly wore shakos with the aforementioned red bands and plumes (and sometimes with now non-regulation red cords as well).

While the regimental facing colours were unchanged, there were more subtle changes to the dress of all four regiments (see Table 3, page 12). For example, the piping of the 1st Swiss was supposedly changed from blue to red on the collar and cuff flaps, and to yellow on the epaulettes, lapels, cuffs and pockets, while for the 3rd the piping was changed from white to red. However, it is uncertain how fully these changes were actually carried through during the turbulent campaigns of 1813–14 – and indeed, exactly how far the basic Bardin regulations were implemented (or adapted) is open to conjecture. Illustrations of Swiss troops from this period show a variety of dress, some according fairly exactly with Bardin, and some (like a grenadier of the 1st still sporting white epaulettes) suggesting that old habits died hard.

H1: Grenadier
This grenadier, perhaps besieged in the town of Delfzijl, wears a textbook example of the Bardin regulation dress, including the shako with red bands and chevrons and the 1812-pattern 'eagle-over-crescent' plate (see H3), the below-the-knee gaiters, and the shortened *habit-veste*.

H2: Fusilier officer
Distinctive in his '*tenue de route*' sky-blue trousers, this officer carries a more workmanlike flank-company officer's sabre rather than a regulation fusilier epée. His shako is notable for the unusual style of the broad 'scale' loop that secures his cockade. Other illustrations of officers from the 4th Swiss – e.g. Olmes after Gaudard, and Pochon – show differing patterns of campaign dress, but all wear trousers of either grey or blue, as well as a plain *surtout*-style jacket with epaulettes and a double row of gold buttons.

H3: Voltigeur
A voltigeur in a Bardin-regulation jacket, and a pair of practical campaign trousers. Several period illustrations show soldiers wearing trousers in dark greys or blues (often with stripes in the facing or piping colour down the seams). Like the light infantry companies of the other Swiss regiments, the voltigeurs of the 4th were prescribed *chamois* collars, epaulettes and insignia.

The two *sabre-briquets* shown here, one dating from 1801 and the other from 1810, were both carried by sappers from Swiss regiments, and are good examples of the style and subtle variations of these weapons. Note that these both have lion's-head pommels, though other designs – notably, cockerels' heads – were also common. Compare with Plate F1. (G. Joyet collection)

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INDEX

References to illustrations are shown in **bold**. Plates are shown with page and caption locators in brackets.

Abyberg, Col 41
Achille 9
Affry, Col d' 18, 36, 41
Affry, Landamann d' 9, 13
Algésiras 9
artillery company, Neuchâtel Bn **36**

Baylen, battle of (1808) 6, **12**, 17–19
Bégos, Capt Louis 12, 19, 34, 36, 38, 39, 45
Beresina river 37–39, **40**
Berthier, Prince of Neuchâtel 23
Blanc, *Chef de bataillon* Pierre-Joseph **D3**(28, 45)
Bons, *Chef de bataillon* de 22, **23**
British 29th Foot, officer 19
Bussy, Voltigeur 12, 20–22, 33, 35, 37, 39–40

cantons **5**
captains of grenadiers **22**, **D2**(28, 45)
Carnot, Lazare 7
Castel-Franco, battle of (1805) 14
Castella de Berlens, Count **17**, 17, 19, 36
Chapelle, Lt-Col **9**, 33
Charles, Archduke of Austria 7, 14, 24
Chasseur â pied, Helvetian Legion **A2**(25, 43)
Chefs de bataillon **23**, **A1**(25, 43), **B1**(26, 44), **D3**(28, 45)
Cintra, Convention of (1808) 19
Clavel, Gen 9, 12, 14
colonels **17**, **33**
corporals, grenadier **D1**(28, 45), **G2**(31, 47)

De Riaz, Capt **18**, 21
drum-majors **15**
drummers **20**, **C3**(27, 45)
Dufresne, Maj 15, 16
Dupont, Gen 17–18

facing colours: demi-brigades 8; regiment **12**
'Foreign Swiss Regiment, 2nd' 41
formation of Swiss regiments **10**, 10, 12–13
French Revolution, impact of 4–6
fusiliers **B3**(26, 44), **E1**(29, 45), **G3**(31, 47), **H3**(32, 47), **35**, **41**; officer **H2**(32, 47)

Gerona, siege of (1808) 22–23, **35**
Graffenreid, Maj von 21
grenadiers **3**, **7**, **22**, **C**(27, 44–45), **D1**, **D2**(28, 45), **G2**(31, 47), **H1**(32, 47), **41**

Haiti (*formerly* St Domingue) 9
Helvetian Confederation 5
Helvetian Legion 4, 5, 6, 7–8; 2nd Line Bn 8, 9–10; *Chasseur â pied* **A2**(25, 43); hussars **6**, **A3**(25, 43); organization 8
Helvetian Republic 4
Hispano-Swiss regiments 6, 17, 18
Holland **H**(32, 47), 41
hussars, Helvetian Legion **6**, **A3**(25, 43)

Italy, 1805–11 14–16; Calabria 14, 15, 16, **C**(27, 44–45)

Joseph Bonaparte, King 14, 15, 17
Junot, Gen Jean-Andoche 17, 19

Korsakov, Alexander Rimsky 7

Landolt, Capt 18
Legion of Honour **18**, 36, 39
Legler, Lt 38, 39, **40**
Leon 21
lieutenant **E1**(29, 45)
Louis XVI, King 3–4
Louis XVIII, King 41
Lunéville, Peace of (1801) 8

Maida, battle of (1806) 14
Masséna, Marshal André 6, 7, 14
May, Col 18, 19
Moldova, Army of 37, 38
mountain passes 3, 22
Muller, Capt 35–36
Murat, Marshal Joachim 15, 16

Naples 14, 15
Napoleon Bonaparte 4–5, 6, 8–9, **10**, 10, 15, 19, 23, 41; Peninsula 17, 22; Russia 33, 35
Naylies (French veteran) 20
Neuchâtel Battalion 5, 23–24, **F**(30, 46) **36**
Ney, Gen Michel 9–10, 39

officers: 1st Swiss Regt **C1**(27, 44), **41**; 3rd Swiss Regt **21**; 4th Swiss Regt **H2**(32, 47); Helvetian Legion **A3**(25, 43); Neuchâtel Bn **F3**(30, 46) *see also individual ranks*
organization, Swiss regiment **13**; 1812 **37**
Oudinot, Marshal, and II Corps 33, 34, 37, 38, 39; order of battle, 1812 **38**

Paris, Tuileries Palace 3–4, 41
Peninsula, 1807–14 17–23, 24; Baylen, battle of, 1808 6, **12**, 17–19; occupation, 1809–14 20–22; Portugal, 1808–09 19–20, **E**(29, 45–46); Valais Bn 22–23, **D**(28, 45), **35**
Perrier, Col 8, 12, 22
Polotsk, battles of (1812): First 34–35; Second 35–37, **39**
Portugal, 1808–09 19–20, **E**(29, 45–46)
Puebla de Sanabria 21

Raguettly, Col 9, 10, 12
recruiting poster **10**
Reynier, Gen 14
Rochechouart 39
Rosselet, Capt 34, 35
Russia, 1812 24, 33–40; 3rd Swiss Regt **G**(31, 46–47), 33, 35, 36, 39; the Beresina 37–39, **40**; invasion 34; Moscow, retreat from 24, 37, 39–40; Oudinot's II Corps order of battle **38**; Polotsk, First 34–35; Polotsk, Second 35–37, **39**; reorganizations 24, 33
Russian army 7, 38, 39; 18th Division 39

St Cyr, Marshal Gouvion **3**, 23, 34, 35, 36, 37
sappers **19**, **F1**(30, 46)
Scarpe, Drum-Major Francois **15**
Schumacher, Capt 36
Second Coalition, War of (1799–1801) 7–8
sergeant-major **B2**(26, 44)
sergeants **E3**(29, 46), **F1**(30, 46)
Sicily 14, 16
Smolensk 24
Soult, Gen Nicolas Jean-de-Dieu 6, 19–20
standard, battalion Eagle **12**
Suvorov, Alexander 7
Swiss brigade 41
Swiss demi-brigades 6–7, **7**, 8, **9**, **A1**(25, 43); 1st 7, 8–9, **9**, **B**(26, 44); 2nd 7, 8, 9; 3rd 7, 8, 9, 10; 4th and 5th 7
Swiss Regiment, 1st 5, 10, 12, 13, 40, **41**, 41; 1st and 2nd Bns 14, 15, 16; 3rd and 4th Bns 9, 14, 15, 16; bicorne **42**; Calabria 14, 15, 16, **C**(27, 44–45); captain's uniform **14**, **43**, **44**, **45**; corporal's jacket **16**; drum-majors **15**; fusiliers **41**; grenadiers **3**, **C**(27, 44–45); Italy 14–16, **C**(27, 44–45); officers **C1**(27, 44), **41**; Russia 35, 36, 38–39, **40**; units transformed into **10**
Swiss Regiment, 2nd 5, 12, 13, 22, 40, 41; 1st Bn 17, 19; 2nd and 4th Bns 17; colonel **17**; fusilier **E1**(29, 45); grenadiers **41**; lieutenant **E1**(29, 45); Peninsula 17, 19, 21, 22; Portugal 19, **E**(29, 45–46); Russia 33, 35–36, 38, 39; voltigeur **E3**(29, 46)
Swiss Regiment, 3rd 5, 12, 13, 40, 41; 1st Bn 17, 18; 2nd Bn 17, 19; 3rd and 4th Bns 24; drummer **20**; fusilier **G1**(31, 47); grenadier **G2**(31, 47); officer **21**; Peninsula 17, 18, 19, 20–21, 22; Russia **G**(31, 46–47), 33, 35, 36, 39; sapper **19**; standard, battalion Eagle **12**; voltigeur **G1**(31, 46)
Swiss Regiment, 4th 5, 12, 13, 22, 40, 41; 1st Bn 22; 2nd Bn 17, 20, 22; 3rd Bn 18; 4th Bn 20, 22; colonel **33**; fusiliers **H2**, **H3**(32, 47); grenadiers **22**, **H1**(32, 47); Holland **H**(32, 47), 41; Peninsula 17, 18, 19, 20, 22; Russia 33, 36, 39

Tchichagov, Adm 37, 38
Thomasset, Lt-Col 21, 24, 33, 34
Trafalgar, battle of (1805) **9**, 9

uniform: bicorne **42**; captain's **14**, **43**, **44**, **45**; coat, Valais Bn officer's **34**; corporal's jacket **16**; shako, voltigeur's **39**

Valais Battalion 5, 22–23, **D**(28, 45), **34**, **35**, 36
Vimiero, battle of (1808) 19
Visinaud, Capt **14**, **43**, **44**, **45**
voltigeurs **E3**(29, 46), **F2**(30, 46), **G1**(31, 46), **36**; shako **39**

weapons: pistol, French cavalry **46**; *sabre-briquets* **47**
Wellesley, Gen Sir Arthur 19, 20
Westphalia, Treaty of (1648) 4
Wittgenstein, Gen Count 34, 35, 36

Zurich, second battle of (1799) 7

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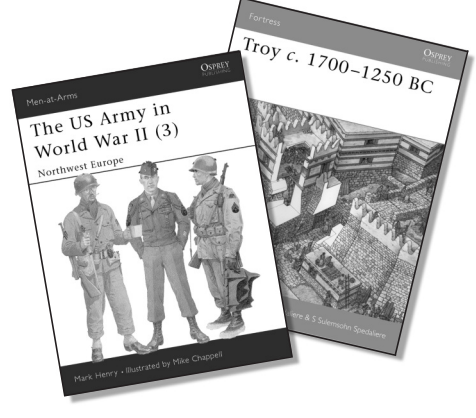

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First published in Great Britain in 2012 by Osprey Publishing,
Midland House, West Way, Botley, Oxford, OX2 0PH, UK
44-02 23rd Street, Suite 219, Long Island City, NY 11101, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Print ISBN: 978 1 84908 678 3
PDF ebook ISBN: 978 1 84908 679 0
ePub ebook ISBN: 978 1 78096 047 0

Editor: Martin Windrow
Page layout by: Melissa Orrom Swan, Oxford
Index by Alan Thatcher
Typeset in Helvetica Neue and ITC New Baskerville
Originated by PDQ Media, Bungay, UK
Printed in China through World Print Ltd.

12 13 14 15 16 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Dedication

To the memory of my mother, Sheila Greentree, and many an enjoyable family holiday in the Swiss Alps.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following for their help with the preparation of this book: Hélène Mock, Musée Militaire, Château de Colombier; Stefan Scherer and Marco Jeker, Bibliothek am Guisanplatz; Urs Buff, Musée Montreux; Juerg Burlet and Erika Hebeisen, Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum; Romaine Syburra-Bertelletto, Musée d'Histoire, Sion; Pascal Pouly, Renato Pacozzi and Nadia Pierro, Musée Militaire Vaudois; and Geoff Banks, Mark Bason, Antony Broughton, Colin Greentree, G. Joyet, Yves Martin, Marshall McCombie, Dave Ryan, and Erwin Schaffner.

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